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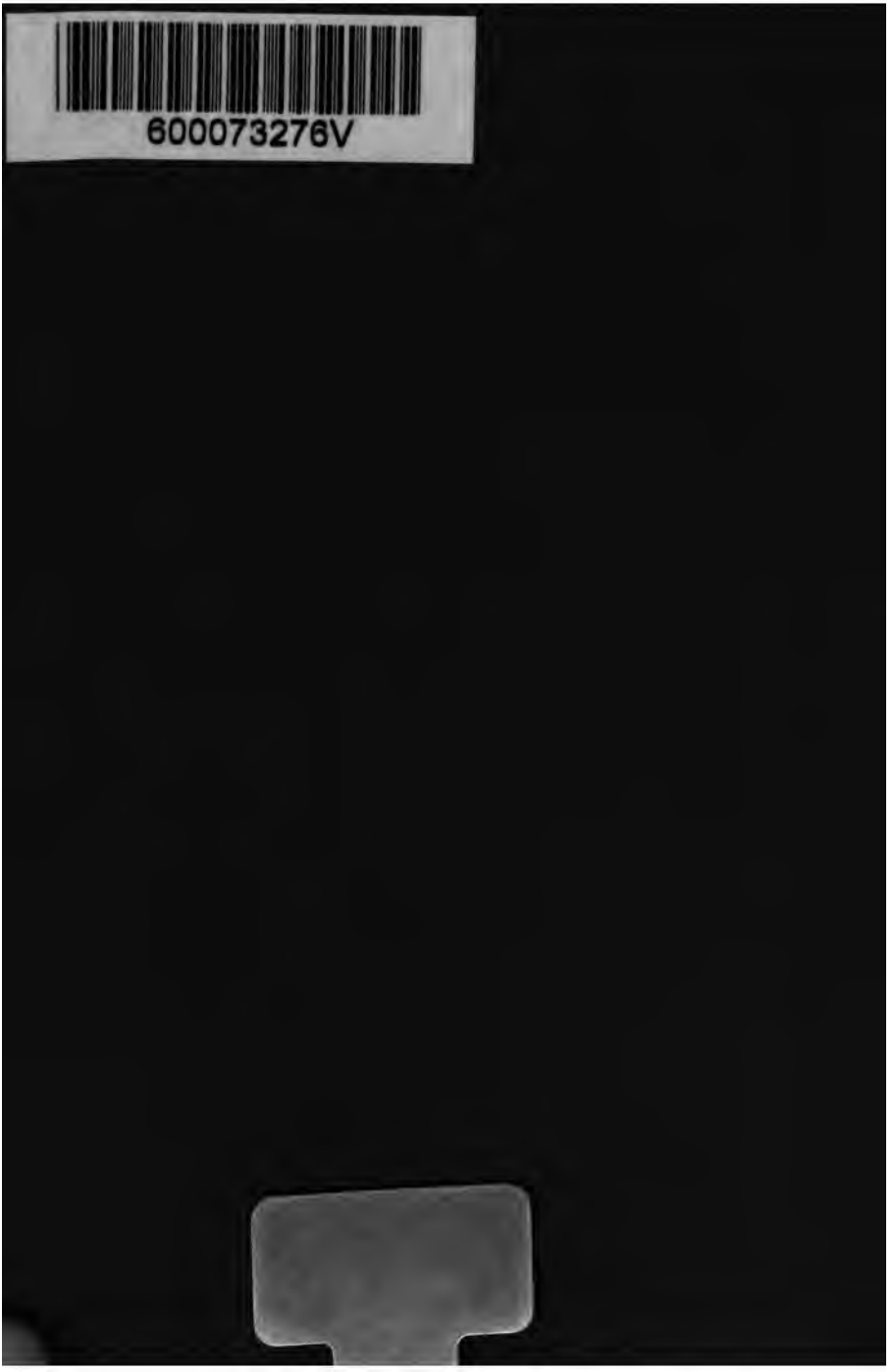
MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND.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LONDON :
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND.

BY

THE HON. MRS. ALFRED MONTGOMERY.

"For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me; then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou! my guide and mine acquaintance."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1872.

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MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND.

CHAPTER I.

THE HEIR.

"TAKE him away, Mary," said a faint voice from behind the transparent folds of the mosquito curtains. "I am too weak to nurse him longer."

The nurse lifted the half-animate bundle of white garments from the young mother's arms, and laid him—for it was a boy—in his cot. The mother closed her eyes and sighed, as though the absence of the baby were a relief. The nurse—not much older than the mother—watched her with a look of anxiety. Mrs.

Charles Falkener opened her eyes and asked if her husband was at home.

"No, ma'am. I have just seen him ride down the field."

"In which direction is he gone?"

Mary paused before answering, as though wishing to evade the question; but the truth must out, and she told her he had gone across the valley towards Mr. Snowden's house. The pale cheek of Annie Falkener flushed, and she moved impatiently on her pillow.

"Has Miss Snowden been here lately?"

"She came yesterday to inquire for you, ma'am."

"Did she see your master? And did she ask to see the baby?"

"No, ma'am, not the baby; but Mr. Falkener stepped out of the dining-room window and spoke to her as she sat on horseback."

There was a pause, and then Annie's eyes filled with tears, and she said,

"Mary, I am very weak, and I am getting weaker. Will you make me a promise?"

"I will do anything you wish, my dear lady; but you must not take on like this. You will hurt yourself, and the baby too."

"It does not matter now, it is only for a very little time. I shall never be well again; and as I shall not live to bring up my child, I want you to promise me that you will not leave him alone to a step-mother."

"Oh! my dear lady, do not talk in that way! What can you mean? You will soon be up and about again yourself. And of course I am not going to leave you and the baby, unless you wish me."

"This will not do, Mary," answered Annie, summoning all her strength to make one strong impression. "Listen to me, and remember every word. I shall die! Mr. Falkener will marry again. *You* know whom he will marry. And I cannot let my child, my own, my only child, be alone with that woman. I don't hate her. I know she is beautiful. He calls her his beautiful panther——"

Mary tried to interpose.

"Oh! yes, I heard him one day when they did not know I was so close. And it is true. She is beautiful. But *I* call her a tigress and a panther. Now mind, Mary, my boy shall be called George. He will be beautiful, because his father was, though I am not; and one day he will be very rich. I will not have him called Charles—fatal name! There shall be no more Charles Falkeners in the world. George means to my mind, all that is grand and noble. You see that it is done. You tell Mr. Falkener."

"But you will tell him yourself, my dear lady," answered Mary, greatly alarmed at her mistress's ever-increasing excitement.

"I think not. I cannot tell. My head seems going. Panther! sleek, beautiful, and wily! Tigress! tearing my heart out! Give me my baby. Let me kiss him, my little George! Give me the small parcel of papers, Mary, that I hid beneath my pillow when I felt my baby was coming into the world. Here it is. Now, swear to me, by all that you hold most sacred,

that you will never part with this to *anyone*—no, not even to Mr. Falkener—until my boy has grown into a man. Then give it to him, and tell him *his mother left it to him*. If you are ill, and likely to die before then, you must consign the trust to some one else, the clergyman of the parish, or some one you can perfectly trust; but, mind, not to Mr. Falkener, nor to his wife."

Mary in vain tried to remonstrate, and break the torrent of fevered utterances. She found it would drive the poor lady to madness if she did not yield. And as the solemnity of the subject disclosed itself to her, all her honest nature, and all her affection for her young mistress, engaged her to give her promise that every wish should be carried out. The packet of papers was carefully sealed, and, strange to say, it was thus addressed, "To my one and only son—to be called George Falkener (George was my father's name), and to be given to him from his dying mother as soon as he is old enough to appreciate the importance of what it contains."

"That is all, Mary," she then resumed, more calmly. "God reward you as you act by me, and by my last request! I leave you, Mary, all I possess of clothes and trinkets. It's not much. There is a note in my desk about it. Tell Mr. Falkener."

The accents of her trembling voice grew fainter and less coherent. Mary was alarmed, and ran to call assistance. High fever had set in. The young mother lay restlessly moving her head from side to side, muttering disjointed sentences, with her husband's name, her child's, and Adelaide's strangely mingled. Her eyes were only half closed, but she seemed to see nothing.

The sad scene was going on when Charles Falkener came home. He held her in his arms and called her by her name, as he had done in the early days of their courtship and marriage. She opened her large pale grey eyes wide as she listened to his voice, and looked, not at him, but beyond him, as though she saw something in the distance. "Take care, take care.

The Tigress!" She muttered lower and lower, her head sank back, she sighed heavily three times; her lips still moved, but no articulate sound came forth; then all was silent, and the doctor drew away Charles Falkener, and put his hand over the glazed, still open eyes. The brief little life was gone. The eighteen springs had ended in the untimely frost of death.

Charles Falkener was like a man beside himself. Was it affection?—was it remorse? Was it not rather a mixture of both, either instigated by the other? What we have lost, and lost for ever, we immediately begin to value. Besides, he was not a bad man; he had a kind heart, and an upright sense of right and wrong; though he wanted strength of principle to hold to the one and avoid the other. He remembered the child with cheeks like a china rose, whom he had taught to love him; and who had learnt the lesson so well that she would rather die than lose him. She was little more than a child still, and she had given him a

son, offering her young life as a sacrifice at the same time.

The circumstances were too simply pathetic not to rouse in him every tender emotion and every manly sentiment. For a time, the gorgeous beauty and wild passion of the self-willed girl who had promised, if necessary, to go off with him, oppressed him like the hot breath of a furnace, scorching and wearying him. It was like sacrilege to think of her at such a moment, in the august presence of the dead; and it was long before any thought of pleasure at his present freedom came to diminish the horror of that death, and the pangs of his own upbraiding conscience.

It was some time before he could even persuade himself that his young wife was really gone, and gone without a word addressed to himself; for he perceived nothing but the wanderings of delirium in her last accents of warning, and her fear of some wild animal. Those words came back to him long after, with the full meaning attached. But at that moment it

was Mary alone who knew whom she meant by the Tigress.

How many warnings in life are granted us in vain, while the glare of passion or the mists of vanity preclude us from reading them aright. Probably few persons have ever met their ruin or their ultimate unhappiness through a fatal affection who at one period had not received either a palpable warning or conceived a strong interior conviction that the object would one day be the cause of anguish. This is quite as true of friendships as of a blinder sentiment, and applies even to the casual acquaintances we form in life. The good angel at our side whispers a word of caution, but we either do not hear or will not heed; and it is only when too late that we recall the blind instinct which told us where our danger lay, and proved our ultimate misfortune to be chiefly from our own fault.

Had Charles Falkener listened to the silent forebodings that seemed to emanate from the lifeless form before him, what a load of misery and crime might have been spared! But

he did as weak characters always do—yielded impulsively and entirely to the emotions of the hour; and as impulsively and entirely turned away from them, after a brief interval, to others not less powerful and far less salutary. The good angel speaks but once, and, that once unheeded, he folds his wings in silence till the fatal blow has struck, and then with sorrowing voice he whispers, "I warned thee."

In the wildness of his despair, Charles was in danger of even forgetting the obvious propriety of informing Adelaide of what had happened. It was Mary who ventured on reminding him; and this she did, not from any sympathy with her late mistress's rival, but to obviate the possible awkwardness of Adelaide's calling in the midst of the preparations for the funeral (which in that hot climate has to take place immediately after death), and the consequent chance of a terrible and unseemly scene.

Adelaide had been in the habit of frequently calling to inquire after Mrs. Falkener, and often came in to see her; and at any moment

after the cool of the evening she might make her appearance, to her own and Falkener's distress. Charles did not altogether understand the nurse's feeling; but he was grateful to her for reminding him to send a note to Miss Snowden, which he did in these words:—

"My poor darling Annie has just breathed her last. Think of me and pity me. I am distracted. We cannot meet at present."

A servant was sent off with the note, and was ordered to give it to Nursie alone, that she might deliver it herself to Miss Snowden. Adelaide was lying in her hammock when Nanny brought it in. Some instinct told her it contained news of importance. She turned pale as she opened it. Then suddenly she looked up with a wild, fierce joy in her glittering eyes, and the blood mantled to her cheek.

"She is dead, Nanny," said she, in a hoarse whisper, as if afraid to trust the accent of her voice by speaking aloud.

"So I see," was Nanny's sententious reply.

The half-savage woman, with her barbarian

nature, understood and appreciated the equally untutored instincts of the European and Christian girl. When principle is dead, there is little difference in the passions of either—nay, perhaps the subtilty of a bad education only renders the nakedness of evil more naked still. Adelaide lay long, ruminating with feverish anxiety on what had so suddenly occurred. But though sudden it was not unexpected. She had believed it would be; and the intensity of her wish to be rid of the one obstruction had almost persuaded her that her wish had ruled the issues of life and death, and brought it about.

"I killed her!" she muttered to herself, not with remorse or horror, but with the silent triumph of an overbearing will. She had made no image in wax of her poor innocent rival, and hung it to melt by a slow fire, as Nanny would have done in like circumstances; but mentally she had done the same; and it seemed impossible but that the occurrence had followed as a necessary consequence. It was not only that the wish was father to the thought, but

that the thought seemed father to the fact. The impalpable thought had worked itself out by the force of its own secret power, until fate, destiny, hidden influences, death itself, had owned its sway and done its bidding.

In this state of mind, it was impossible but that solitude should soon appear unbearable to Adelaide. She wanted to be up and doing; she wanted to see Falkener—not from a tender compassion for his sufferings, but from an impatient feeling that it was her right to do so. The other tie was broken: why was he not by her side? Her reason told her it was impossible. But there was something at work that did not listen to reason. She could not or would not arrest her imagination on the sad details which absorbed Falkener's time and attention at such a moment, but, leaping over all the hard necessities of fact, thought only of her poor rival as gone, of her own freedom as complete, and panted to enter on a new and larger liberty of life as the consequence of what had happened.

It was not, however, possible that this half-delirious, unreasoning state should last. The hard walls and the sharp angles of reality were there to hedge in her wild fancy, and bring her into a more sober condition. It was with a meaning scowl that her father informed her of the death, as though she did not already know it, and told her he was going to the funeral.

Whether intentionally or not, he dwelt a great deal on poor Mrs. Falkener's amiable disposition, on the loss she would be to her husband, and on the sad position of the little motherless infant. It reminded him, he said, of when she had been left on his hands, a little older, it is true, but much in the same helpless condition. And from beginning to talk sulkily of the death, as though warning Adelaide against entertaining any hopes in consequence, supposing there to be a liking between her and Falkener, he ended in being quite sentimental about the bereaved husband and the little orphan.

Adelaide champed an invisible bit, like a wild

horse constrained to harness; and when all was still in the house, her father absent, and the quiet moon looking coldly down, she still paced the garden walks, inwardly cursing what she called the conventionalities of life, and longing for wings, other than the dove's, to carry her not to rest, but to life and action.

The next morning, at an early hour, the wild girl broke through the conventionalities, as she called them, and ordered Long Jack to bring round her horse before the sun grew hot. She was waiting at the door ready to mount as the first streaks of the warm dawn flushed the eastern sky. There she stood, gathering up the folds of her blue tight-fitting habit, which so well defined the outline of that tiny waist and, considering her youth, rather fully-developed form. A broad-brimmed hat with a blue veil threw a tender shade on her richly-tinted cheek and coral lips. She was looking lovely; her dark tresses had been hastily gathered together and fell rather low on her neck; her eyes were all brightness and silent laughter.

No one would have dreamed she was going to a house of death.

The extreme beauty of the morning seemed to fill her with a silent, sensuous pleasure. The birds were waking, with their many varied and joyous, but not very musical cries—for singing birds are rare in those climates. The dew still lay on the grass, soon to be lapped up as the morning's draught of the thirsty sunbeams; and gorgeous beetles, and large, many-coloured butterflies were emerging from hole and cranny, the former lazily crawling up the stems of grass and flowers, the others whirling and dancing in circles overhead.

But as Adelaide approached Charles Falkener's house another feeling seemed to seize her. She quickened her horse's pace, and rode rapidly through the cool wood. As she advanced towards the door some of the negroes already at work in the plantation, and some sweeping the lawn in front of the house, leaned upon their hoes and brooms to look at her. Two of the principal men threw down their tools and advanc-

ed to meet her, with the garrulous and picturesque greetings of their race; and having ascertained that Mr. Falkener was up and already in his study, she leapt unaided from her horse, flung the bridle on his neck, and desired one of the negroes to go before and announce her. What was she expecting? What emotion had so blanched her cheek and given a wild fitful fire to her eye?

She allowed the negro to go some paces in advance, and paused outside as he entered and, going close up to his master, gave his message. She heard no reply, and as the man came out she pushed past him and went in.

Three yards from where she stood sat Charles Falkener, in a low cane chair. His beautiful, thick auburn locks were all unbrushed and dishevelled. His face was buried in his hands, and his elbows on his knees. He looked as if he had been up all night, and had not changed his clothes for four-and-twenty hours.

She went up to him. He neither spoke nor stirred. She put a hand on his shoulder and

called him by his name. A shudder ran through his frame which shook the little hand that rested on him, and a sob was the only reply. She could not bear it, and she was incapable of understanding it. She knelt down on the ground beside him and took his hands in hers to draw them from his face.

"Charles, Charles, is this the way you receive me?"

"She is dead, Adelaide, she is *dead!*"

Could she not perceive, was she then unable to comprehend the awful sanctity of death? Did she not know that the dead had rights, brief in duration, it is true, but which, while they last, are superior to the living claims? The awful sanctity of a corpse demands the service of the survivors, even at their risk and peril. And with the shots still dropping around, the vanquished soldiers will linger to bury their dead. What then when the dead have been our own, the wife of our bosom, the child of our heart!

She dragged away his unresisting hand, but his eyes were so full of tears, and so red with

weeping, that he hardly seemed to see her.

"Oh, Charles! I am your own Adelaide; have you forgotten?"

He staggered up from his chair, half pushing her from him.

"Forgotten!" he exclaimed, "would to God I had; would to God I *could* forget."

For a moment she crouched on the floor, where his sudden movement had left her. She looked up at him from beneath the heavy plaits of her loosened hair with a look half frightened, half indignant. With one bound she was before him; she flung her arms round his neck, she raised those coral lips to his, as close as she dared without actually touching them.

"Oh, Charles! my own, my darling; you could not wish to forget me. You, who are all the world to me, and for whom I have been ready to dare more than woman should dare; you cannot be so cruel as to repel me now. You are bewildered, darling. You forget that now we are free."

"And *you*, Adelaide, forget that she is *dead*."

Her arms fell from his neck, she stept back a pace, and with ghastly cheeks and deep dark eyes she looked wildly at him.

"You speak as if *I* had killed her; what had I to do with her death?"

"This much you had to do with it, Adelaide, that for your sake I neglected her; for your sake I left her in her youth, in her failing health, in her pining solitude, to wither like a flower broken on its stem. And now she is gone, I see it all. And I know that we have sinned."

"We sinned, Charles?" said the indignant girl as, raising herself to her full height, she swept her hair from her brow with so sudden a movement that all its wealth of glossy coils came rippling to her waist. "What have you ever gained from me that you can dare to call a *sin*? I have loved you, it is true. Was *that* a sin—and will *you* call it so? Did I try to win your love the first? Was I the first to speak of love? And if at last I loved in return, can you

say it was unsought? And even if you could, is this my just reward!"

"Adelaide, do you not see that I am stunned and miserable?"

"Then I will leave you. I cannot recall your baby wife, whose loss is suddenly so great a one. But I can at least rid you of the presence of the woman who was capable of loving you as she believed you deserved to be loved."

She slowly turned to reach the door, but ere her hand had touched the lock she heard him murmur,

"O God! what an accursed man I am!"

She turned her head. He was standing with his arms hanging loosely by his side, and his head dropped on his breast. She said in a low voice—

"Charles!"

He half raised his face. Their eyes met. For many seconds neither spoke; but the expression of each pale face softened as each gazed on the other. He held out his arms, and with a rush she was within them. She wept over him, her

tears mingling with his, though from another source, and she murmured his name with every expression of endearment, asking him in broken accents, that waited for no answer, whether he had forgotten their true and faithful love, and did not know that now they might look forward to perfect bliss.

Charles made but little answer. He was like a man in a dream. His fingers strayed through her falling hair in an abstracted way. He soothed her as a man would a passionate child, whose feelings he could not share. But Adelaide had all the evil instincts of her evil feminine nature. She knew, without reflecting, that fire kindles fire, passion wakes passion. The spark is there, but needs to be fanned. And so she bewildered him with her syren voice, and came between him and his conscience. Her kisses sucked the holy repentance from his bleeding heart, and drank the remorseful tears from his eyes. And when she had again bewitched him and lured him away from the present into a fictitious world of the future; when she knew

that her snares were as surely round his soul as her hands were clasped upon his knees, then she herself led him to talk over the past and tell of his grief, while she poured insidious opiates into the wound. She led him on to tell her all—drawing the sting of regret out of every sentence as it fell from his lips. She sat on the floor before him, looking up with all her lavish beauty into his pale face. In her heart she did not share one of his nobler sentiments about his dead wife, or respond to one of his remorseful expressions about his own neglect of her; but she listened to each and all, succeeding in putting forward some reflex image of herself, which, like the thin end of the wedge, should in time drive out all memory of the dead and gone.

More than an hour had passed in this way, and she had succeeded in diminishing all Charles's good feelings, while she at the same time persuaded him she was full of them herself. He had grown to think he had not neglected his dead Annie, and that no one had better

[illegible] appeared her than Annie. It was [illegible] and she had wed another. Annie being [illegible] but who could help that? It was fate, destiny, anything you please, but certainly not [illegible]. They had done no wrong, and now heaven had rewarded their virtue, and for the future a long, delirious Io pæan to the god of love was what life had in store for them. Meanwhile, as a tender duty, as a reciprocal sentiment, let them together visit the dead!

Charles was the first to propose it in one of those moments when his better self had risen to the surface, in that perpetual ebb and flow which the wily woman before him was keeping up.

"Would you mind it, Adelaide; would you be afraid to come with me and look once more on my poor darling's face? I do not think there is much change yet—would you mind?"

"I mind nothing with you, Charles. And it would be my own wish," she added, "to see her sweet little face again."

She looked round the room. It contained no

flowers. The absence of a woman's hand was painfully evident in the total want of all such lesser refinements of life. She looked out into the verandah, for the windows were of course open. Huge bunches of the banksia rose were hanging their cream-white blossoms in prodigal sweetness overhead. She tore down a few of the branches, and collected a handful of the miniature flowers.

"Take me, Charles, and let me lay this little offering in the coffin." She looked at the three doorways in the room, and approaching him timidly, whispered, "Where is it?"

"It!" That awful, unspeakable, undefinable "it" was upstairs in the room where the one life had given place to the other, and the child had seemed to claim the breath which the poor mother relinquished. Charles preceded Adelaide. At the top of the stairs was a long, wide, external corridor, upon which opened the doors of the sleeping apartments. The last room was that in which Annie lay dead; the door before it was the nursery. When they entered the

corridor they walked side by side, Charles keeping the nearer to the doors. That of the infant's room was open. They passed before it without a pause, and Charles was the first to enter his dead wife's apartment. He walked up to where the uncovered coffin stood, and knelt down beside it. Adelaide stood. A white embroidered and lace-edged handkerchief covered the face. She took one corner and gently raised it. Did the angels in heaven veil their faces as the living woman looked on the dead?

Adelaide had never seen death so close before. She looked and looked—was that Annie with the blue line around those sunken lips, the eyes lost in their orbits, and the small pinched nose? The face was marble white save for that livid tinge round the mouth, and for the dark eyebrows, looking so much darker than in life. She almost fancied the eyes were opening and the lips unclosing, as she gazed and gazed. And suddenly, as if unable longer to endure the weird feeling, she laid the white roses round the whiter face, and dropped again the hand-

kerchief in its place. She had not reverently kissed the forehead, and no reverence had filled her thoughts. A certain curiosity at a new though odious spectacle, a certain horror at its ghastliness, and with all a certain profound contentment that the thing was done and gone, and that a very few more hours even would have the whole matter buried out of sight.

She came round to where Charles was kneeling, and touched him on the shoulder. He looked at her with tear-dimmed eyes, and rose to lead her away. Before passing the door of the nursery they paused in the corridor, and Adelaide, as if anxious to look out again on the wide living earth and the broad free heavens, raised one of the blinds of matting. At that moment Mary stood in the doorway, and as she saw them, uttered an exclamation of horror. She glanced at Adelaide, and then addressing herself to Charles, she said,

"Oh! sir, you will never take Miss Snowden there? For God's sake, sir, don't do *that!*"

She did not know that they had already been

to see her mistress, and was evidently bent on preventing it.

"Miss Snowden has seen my poor wife, Mary, and has laid some flowers in the coffin."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Mary, glancing with indignation from one to the other.

"I am not afraid of seeing death, Mary," remarked Adelaide, in a sweet, low voice.

"But there are some of the dead you *might* be afeared to see, I should have thought, Miss Adelaide. And if she bean't one, I don't know who is. It's a fine thing to bring flowers to her dead, when you brought naught but thorns to her living! Oh! my poor mistress!" continued the poor girl, bursting into tears; "to think that I should not have been able to save you from this!"

"Come away, my darling," whispered Charles, touching Adelaide's arm, "Mary's nerves are unstrung with her long nursing, and she does not know what she is saying."

Adelaide was very pale, and her eyes had a dark glower in them.

"Do you think I heed what she says? I want to see the baby. Is he here?"

And with a perfectly calm step, and a look of considerable dignity, Adelaide walked into the nursery, straight up to the baby's cot. She turned down the sheet from the child's sleeping face with the same coolness she had raised the handkerchief from the mother's dead face; and she leant down to kiss the unconscious infant. That done she left the room as calmly as she had entered it, taking no notice of poor Mary sitting sobbing and rocking herself in her chair. Once outside, she put her arm through Charles's, clasped the other hand upon it, and, leaning close to him, whispered,

"I shall love the little darling for your sake, Charles!"

The past was all forgotten. The dead were as good as buried; and winning him once more to such an affectionate leave-taking as in itself was sacrilege, she bid him not on any account follow her to the door, but let herself out of the house, called to Long Jack standing within the

shadow of a deep shed beneath the trees, remounted her horse, and galloped home. On her way she met groups of people coming for the funeral. A few more hours, nay less, and all that was irksome, disagreeable, and almost disgusting would be over.

When she got past the sad-looking, sober mourners, who, whether in truth or earnest, wore a funereal aspect, she slackened her horse's pace and made the woods echo to her thrilling voice, as she sang this anacreontic love-ditty:—

"Let my life be bright as the ocean's spray,
And my heart as the wild bird's free;
With nothing to do by night or by day,
But to dream, my belovéd, of thee.

"I will press my heart in a golden cup,
And will hang my soul on the brink,
With laughter and kisses brimming it up,
And will hand it to thee to drink.

"Then sip it and quaff it in loving mirth,
And leave but the dregs for me;
For naught do I care for in heaven or earth,
But to dream, my belovéd, of thee."

CHAPTER II.

OLD FRIENDS AND NEW.

THE last rites over and the mourning guests departed, Charles was left in his solitary home. He was a man well-beloved by his fellows, and more than one had wrung his hand and offered to spend that evening or remain a few days with him. But Charles's mind was out of tune. His sorrow sat ill on him. He did not know how to wear it, because there were other feelings in his heart thoroughly ill-assorted to it, and which produced a jar that made sympathy quite impossible, and its offer only an aggravation of misery.

Our motives are always mixed, and often, but less frequently, our sorrows are also. How

generally have our friends found us plunged in grief in consequence of some great calamity that has befallen us, and how lavishly they have poured out their compassion, detailing while doing so the points which called it forth. Alas! all the time, much lower down than the obvious sorrow, there has been another, more or less remotely connected with it, and quite secret to ourselves. It is by far the hardest to bear, and it cannot be explained. It is at the very core of the other grief, and our friends see only the outer coating. It is for the most part inarticulate even to ourselves; and with a feeling of faintness we turn a deaf ear to their condolence, skimming over the surface of our souls, and ignoring the deep, dark caverns below. Sometimes it is the sting of self-accusation; sometimes it is a simultaneous grief that to any but ourselves would appear a cause quite inadequate to its effect. Oh! human sympathy, at best how poor thou art to those that need thee most!

A little later Charles felt he should be glad of the presence of a friend who would talk to

him of anything in the world but the death of his wife, his present feelings, or his future prospects. But for that night, at least, he wanted perfect and entire solitude.

He could not, however, obtain it. There haunted him, not a presence, but a sound as he sat in the same arm-chair in which Adelaide had found him. A tiny, thin sound of an infant wailing came through the long, draughty passages and open doors of a Jamaica house. Yes, there was the sound that had now to fill his life, and make its daily, nay hourly claim upon him. What should he do with it? "Poor little thing!" he kept murmuring to himself, as the faint cry of his two-weeks-old baby reached his ears, interspersed with Mary's chaunted and cajoling lullabies. He felt full of tenderness for the little creature; and sometimes the tenderness rose to a high resolve to be a good father to the child, and make a man of him.

Then came the question would Adelaide make a good stepmother? He fancied he saw her in her rich, voluptuous beauty, hanging

over the young infant; and something whispered she would be jealous of his son. He put away that thought, to take up another of wonder as to what Mary's strange conduct had meant. Perhaps he understood that better than he would allow, even to himself. Finally he dropt both threads, to let the large rope of thought and sentiment combined, twine itself round his heart and round his senses, as he recalled the picture of Adelaide crouching there at his feet, as she had done a few hours previous, in all her angry love and wild vehemence. The whole thing was like a fever-dream, and he literally turned hot and cold under its influence.

It might be nine o'clock at night, and he was sitting in the verandah, looking up at the quiet, majestic stars and listening to the buzz of the insects, when he heard a horse's step approach the back entrance, and presently recognised Mr. Williams's voice. His agent had of course been present at the funeral, and had ridden back to his home, close to which was the post-office. Mr. Falkener's letters were always de-

livered at the agent's house. One, which we are already acquainted with, had arrived when he reached home. He knew Mr. John Falkener's hand-writing; and it was marked "immediate." Mr. Williams thought it might at least produce a diversion in his master's troubled thoughts, and therefore with great good-nature had determined to ride back with it, instead of waiting, as usual, for the labourers going down to the house just about sunrise. So far he was perfectly right—it did produce a very great diversion in Charles Falkener's thoughts, and occupied them very considerably. He did not like the announcement of his father's marriage. He was even inclined to gesticulate, and say that the governor was an old fool. Then, too, he was grieved for his mother; and with a sudden, introspective glance at his own state of mind, he exclaimed passionately, in a way which almost startled the quiet Williams admitted to these confidences,

"Really it would seem that women are only born to be forgotten!"

Charles was not of an avaricious nature, and he did not think with any particular anxiety about the younger brothers and sisters that might follow on this event.

"I suppose," he said, as Williams threw out some suggestion of that nature, "that there is enough for as many as are likely to come treading on my heels. I think it is a very foolish business on my father's part; and it does not at all add to my desire to return to England. His letter is full of good advice"—(he had not alluded to the nature of the advice to Mr. Williams,)—"and I think I shall remain here to digest it."

They talked on over as much of the letter as Charles chose to communicate to Williams, till late at night—or rather till early in the morning. And then Williams accepted a bed there; and accident had done for Charles more than all the proffered sympathy of his friends could have effected—it had diverted his thoughts, brought in a crowd of fresh motives for action, and filled him with a host of new hopes and fears.

With the early morning came the necessity for determining on some plan of action. He would be glad to see Adelaide, and talk it over with her; but on the other hand that latter part of his father's letter made this very awkward. Still he could not conceal the fact of his father's marriage, nor his desire that he should go to England. And then came the momentous question of how he should inform his father of his own marriage, his son's birth, and his wife's death. There was a whole life to be confessed; and in what way should it be done?

There was that in Adelaide's passionate and powerful nature which Charles leant on, to make up for his own too easy, too careless good-nature; and soon he began to feel fretted by the thought that it was difficult, under existing circumstances, to get at Adelaide; for, independent of the disagreeable suspicions entertained by Mr. Snowden in the past, and which were certain to acquire greater force now, it was absolutely impossible for him in common

decency to prevent Mr. Sherwden's house, and the society of his beautiful daughter, so immediately after his wife's death. There was one comfort—Adelaide was sure to know what to do, and how to get out of any difficulty of this nature. It would suffice to put the matter before her. He wrote thus:—

"I must have some sure and certain means of holding communication with you. Matters may become more and more complicated—they are so already. After all that has passed, we cannot remain as strangers to each other until conventional rules admit of my coming frequently once more to your father's house. I doubt, too, if he will ever again admit of that. Oh! Adelaide, we seem further apart than ever! Let me know what you can propose, and be assured I shall second all your wishes. Ever yours, ——."

He could trust his own servant to deliver this confidentially to Nanny, who would easily

manage to transmit the reply. Before night it came as follows :—

"I feel the difficulty as much as you do. I have already thought of a method; but before I can put it in motion, will you authorise me to offer the loan of your little house, where Mr. Williams's mother used to live, and which stands on the borders of the wood which divides us, to my friend, Georgiana Oswald? She wants to have it, I know, but from feelings of delicacy, will not ask you. She has enough furniture to add to what is already there. Agree to this, and all the rest will be easy.—Your own, A."

The answer to this came speedily :—

"Certainly, by all means. The men are there already putting everything in order. I think I see your drift, you darling!—C."

For some time previous to poor Annie's death, Adelaide had found it necessary to seek some support against the odious calumnies which the Johnstone family had so maliciously endeavoured to propagate after the sad death

of their only son. For a certain period no intercourse had been possible between the two families, and as they were the two leading houses in point of wealth and consideration in the neighbourhood, the estrangement had given rise to much remark and many inconveniences. Adelaide cared nothing about what anybody said; she was prepared to brave any amount of evil report, whether deserved or not—indeed, it always seemed to act as an incentive to her pride, and to increase her self-sufficient independence of character. But though the loss of intimacy with poor prosy Mrs. Johnstone, and the generally washed-out Sarah, could very easily be borne, yet in the end it would interfere seriously with her enjoyment of society in the neighbourhood, and might cut her off from a good deal of amusement. It was necessary, therefore, that a reconciliation of some kind should be effected between the Snowdens and the Johnstones; and Adelaide was not likely to be long without finding out the way to accomplish her object.

Amongst their neighbours was a Mrs. Marshall, whose husband held some official post in Kingston, and who lived with her two daughters Jane and Maria, in a pretty little house not far from the Johnstones. Adelaide frequently broke the monotony of her home existence by going to spend the day there; that being the way in which neighbourly visits were generally carried on in Jamaica, and which was better adapted to the extreme heat of the climate, and consequent indolence of the inhabitants, than our afternoon calls; the exertion of such in the middle of the day being too great for man or beast.

It was at Mrs. Marshall's that Adelaide had first met Georgiana Oswald; a pretty lively widow of five-and-twenty, whose husband had died less than a year previous in Jamaica, and who was unable to return to England till some affairs connected with his property, and for which her presence was necessary, were concluded. Mrs. Oswald had qualities which by contrast were very attractive to Adelaide. She

[illegible] the same [illegible] as that of a [illegible]. She knew she was pretty, and she loved to make the most of her charms, and was determined to get as much small change out of her life as she could. She had gone very sincerely in Mr. Oswald three months, and mourned him very demurely for six. The widow's cap had been becoming, and some doubts had crossed her mind as to whether she should not wear it all the end of the year. But at the very moment she was sitting before her looking-glass weighing this doubtful point, a sudden movement had shaken down all the yellow waves of her abundant hair, with its provoking tendency to fall into ringlets, and that had decided the question.

It was so much easier to toss it up, drawing it off the white though rather narrow forehead, and then allow it, after forming a loose knot at the top of her head, to dispose of itself as it pleased for the rest of its length. And so the widow's cap was laid aside, and certainly the yellow hair

looked uncommonly well on the black bombazine and crape.

Mrs. Oswald was incapable of the passionate and ponderous characteristics of Adelaide's nature. There was far more light and shade, and give and take, in the slight little woman, with her small neat features, than in her with the grand proportions and luxuriant beauty. So long as Adelaide had the right colours well massed around her, you would never have thought of remarking the minor details of her dress. They either did not exist, or they were sure to be right. But to Mrs. Oswald the position of a bow, or the fall of a bit of ribbon, was of essential importance. The details had to be as carefully disposed as in preparing a Dresden china goddess. And when it was done the effect was very agreeable, and you admired the result without very accurately defining how much was due to the woman, and how much to the dress. Added to this, she had a pretty little, dependent, helpless way about her, which particularly developed itself

in the presence of the stronger sex, though it had been known entirely to vanish whenever Mrs. Oswald was accidentally thrown on her own resources; and this made her very engaging, and was generally accepted by the lords of creation as a charming silent homage to their superior worth.

Adelaide was a woman to govern one man through a whole life. Mrs. Oswald would catch a dozen in her net within twelve months, and they would all fly away, amused and scathless, in a quarter of that time. She was not at all a wise woman. But no one ever got so much good out of their folly. It was a perfect fortune to her. It had got her Mr. Oswald, who had made her an excellent husband, and who had first met her when undertaking a foreign tour on her own account at the age of nineteen. He found her greatly alarmed at the too pressing attentions of a Russian count on the long railway journey from Paris to Marseilles, she having very foolishly accepted the share of a *coupé* with him, only because she thought it would be

more comfortable, and that he had been so very polite in offering it. She never could, she affirmed, do anything without a friend to advise her. Cart-loads of advice were emptied at her feet, and the expression of her gratitude was so exuberant that most of the givers forgot to notice that it always ended in her going her own way after all.

Mrs. Oswald was a first cousin of poor young Johnstone's, and Mrs. Johnstone being, with all her vulgarity, a kind, motherly sort of woman, had felt it was a charity to offer a home to the poor young widow during the months that the widow's cap was still in vogue. Georgiana would have found it rather dull, even for a widow, but for the vicinity of Mrs. Marshall and her two lively girls. She was constantly down at their house; and finally, when the yellow ringlets had got shaken back into their place, she thought the time was come when she might profit by her liberty in setting up a little house for herself.

With all this it will be very evident to our

readers that Georgiana Oswald was not devoid of the spirit of intrigue—few women are; and certainly none of her particular stamp. She had began, as we have said, by leaving a good, comfortable, extremely dull home at nineteen, in search of adventure, under the pretence of travelling to improve herself. Her mother had died when she was seven years old, and she had been brought up by a sister fifteen years older than herself, and an aged maiden aunt; the only other inmate of the dull little house in the small country village being a brother of twelve, to whom and for whom everything in life was to be sacrificed. Miss Georgiana was quite sure she should manage better for herself out in the wide world. The death of an uncle put two hundred pounds at her disposal, and so, without any very authentic leave-taking, Georgie slipt away one early morning, and embarked from Dover to Calais. We have already shown that she picked up a husband before she had got to Marseilles.

Adelaide was beginning to feel the great

awkwardness of her position with regard to the Johnstones, when she met Mrs. Oswald at the Marshalls. Here then was a medium and a go-between of the very kind to be most useful. She was sure to undertake the task with joy, because it would add to her own importance; and because also she really was a kind-hearted little woman, willing to render a service where she could; and quite certain to persevere honestly in it, unless the weaving of one of her own little webs came across the woof.

Mrs. Oswald was too much of a woman of the world, in her own way, to be quite won over to the Johnstone side of the question by the innendoes and virulence of the mother and sister whenever Adelaide's name was mentioned. Indeed, at the period at which our story finds us, poor Mrs. Johnstone was growing to have a softened feeling towards the girl whom her own boy had adored. Sarah hated her still; but then she had not loved her before her brother's death, and she never would have done so, for Adelaide was beautiful and successful, and

Sarah was neither. The old lady would shake her head pathetically when Sarah let fall one of her bitter remarks, and would ejaculate, "Still, you know, my dear, *he* loved her!"

Once or twice Sarah had made a retort which had been so ill-received that she very plainly saw she must attempt nothing more of the kind. In short, the ground was preparing at the very time Adelaide became acquainted with Georgiana. At that time Mrs. Oswald hardly knew Charles Falkener, and she was also not aware how very intimate Adelaide was with him. She had seen him once or twice, but casually, and looked upon him quite as a hero of romance, in consequence of his great personal beauty; but she had not spoken to him half a dozen words. Adelaide had commenced by asking very tenderly after Mrs. Johnstone, in a way which Mrs. Oswald felt called upon to repeat to that lady. She was gratified when she found that the casual statement respecting Adelaide's interest in Mrs. Johnstone's health was received with a burst of confidence.

"After all, my dear Georgie," said the old lady, wiping her eyes as she wound up the account of her dear son's tragic death, "I always do say it is hardly fair of Sarah to speak as if Miss Snowden had murdered him. You know Sarah is sometimes a little sharp with her tongue; as is not surprising, considering the sorrows she has had herself from young Riddle, who jilted her ten years ago. But still I never can agree with her speaking as if the poor girl had taken up the pistol and fired it at him with her own hands. A thing, as you know, that could not be, since ladies don't fight duels; though I have heard in the United States they have come to that, all owing to the rights of women. But I must say for myself I never wished there to be any quarrel between us and the Snowdens. I have known Adelaide's father the last twenty years at least; and I don't see why, because the families haven't been united by matrimony, they should therefore not be friends. She has her faults, has Adelaide, but she's a fine creature, and my boy loved her,

and that's the long and the short of it to me. And so, Georgie, if Adelaide inquires after my health, as you tell me she has done, I inquire after hers; and I conclude that's about the way that things will be brought about for a reconciliation."

This was exactly what both Adelaide and Georgiana wanted; and therefore the latter had made the most of her message to the former. But Sarah was still in the way; she wanted no reconciliation. Like the stormy petrel she was most at home in troubled waters. A good grievance was not a thing to be parted with lightly. And in this instance she thought she had got one which would last a life-time—indepen dent of the other in connection with Mr. Riddle, which she was prepared to drop the moment any more faithful swain should present himself.

The poor old mother was very much afraid of her daughter, always attributing Sarah's volubility and acrimony of abuse to the superior education she had been able to afford her,

and which, of course, like other great blessings, might have its various drawbacks. It was therefore arranged that Mrs. Johnstone should come down some evening to Mrs. Marshall's to meet Adelaide, when Sarah should be otherwise engaged. This was happily effected, and in Mrs. Oswald's presence. Mrs. Johnstone folded Adelaide in a warm and matronly embrace, not without some of that theatrical grace which was no doubt a reminiscence of times when she had taken a leading part in Racine's tragedy of "Esther."

Adelaide acted her part to perfection. She said but little, and was gentle and quiet. The long lashes covered her downcast eyes, and thus shaded their sometimes soulless glitter. She let the old lady caress her, and expound to her as much and as long as she pleased; and a few well-adjusted monosyllabic replies gave her all the appearance of being penetrated with feelings becoming the situation. Before the visit was over Adelaide, who knew it was even more important to gain over the daughter than

the mother, timidly asked after Sarah. When Mrs. Johnstone returned home she made the most of all that had passed, and dilated fully on Adelaide's affectionate inquiries. Sarah as good as told her mother she was a fool, but the latter stuck to her point.

She who might have been at the head of that house should not be kept from crossing its threshold because its former master had died for the love of her; and ever afterwards Adelaide was a welcome guest to the mother, and was at least tolerated by the sister of the unfortunate young man.

It was not many days after Adelaide's letter to Charles that Mrs. Oswald was sitting in the pretty little pen, as Jamaica houses are called, on the borders of the wood between Mr. Snowden's house and Mr. Falkener's; and consequently very near the scene of the tragedy. The garden, which had long been neglected, had readily been put into order by Charles's labourers. Where the vegetation is so rich and luxuriant very little is needed to make a paradise

out of a plot of wild and natural growth. The light furniture used in those countries, where drapery is avoided as only adding to the heat, had been brought partly from the Johnstones', partly provided by Adelaide; the rest offered by Mr. Falkener as an inducement to his fair tenant to make herself at home.

Adelaide was enchanted with the whole arrangement, and had come to spend a couple of days with her friend, bringing, of course, Nanny with her.

The sun had set, and both were sitting at the window open to the ground, imparting a whole string of such confidences as women are wont to repose in each other.

"And so it happened close by here. You must show me the exact spot some day, Adelaide. Do you know I almost envy you having actually witnessed a duel? It is such an unusual thing to happen to a woman, you know. But now tell me, were you not in love with him?"

"Do I look, Georgie, as if I were the victim

of an unfortunate and recent attachment? No, I did not care for him in the least. I was very much shocked at his death; but then, you know, I had been intimate with the whole family for so long; and for some weeks I never got over the horror of what I had seen. Those words, 'Shot through the heart,' used to wake me up in the middle of the night, and I fancied I heard poor Johnstone's voice saying them, as though he were reproaching me."

"Oh, how awful! It would have killed me. If I had never loved him living I should have loved him dead, and should have worked myself up into *une belle passion* just when everything was over."

"I dare say many women would have done so," said Adelaide. "But I am not one of that sort."

"I wonder of what sort you are, Addy. I don't think I quite understand you yet."

"I am of the sort that do no good to the object of their affection, or to themselves either. Of that you may be sure, Georgiana."

"Why, what can you mean? Your love would be a boon to any man, Adelaide. I only wish I could find one worthy of it."

"You are wrong. I am a fatal woman, and shall be the ruin of the man I marry. Poor Johnstone has had the better fate."

"You only think that, in the way young girls take up strange ideas respecting their future destiny. When I was young I lived in a barrack town. I thought, of course, I should marry the Major or the Colonel; and it took such hold of me that I could never see either of them coming down the street without changing colour. Instead of which I married a Jamaica planter, and am now a poor little disconsolate widow, with more than half my life still before me."

"You will marry again. I wonder who it will be? There are so few to choose from here. But I suppose, as soon as your affairs are settled, you will go back to England; and then, with your beauty and your nice little fortune, it will be a very easy matter."

"Ah! Addy, you don't know what it is to have lost a good husband, as I have," and the little widow sighed and shook her yellow curls. "I do own I find my life very lonely, and I like the feeling of there being a man about the house. It sounds cheerful; and even if you do quarrel a little bit every now and then, why it makes a diversity."

"What strange notions you have, Georgie! I don't think quarrelling with me is a diversity many men would be glad to try a second time. Somebody once named me Panther. I believe it was a compliment, and that I am in truth more like a tigress."

"You are gradually letting the cat out of the bag, Addy. May I know who calls you Panther?"

"I put it in the past tense, my dear."

"That won't do, Addy. You told me the other day Johnstone was the only thoroughly declared lover you ever had; it was not he, I am sure; and the thing must have gone some length for a man to call you Panther."

"I shall say no more, you sceptical woman. If there should ever be anything to find out, I think I would back you against anybody, Georgie, to do it. You are the woman to smell out a secret, as a cat does a mouse."

"Then why, if there be a secret, don't you make a merit of it and confide it to me at once?"

"Because I have not so much as acknowledged that there is a secret. Time enough when I have got one. You will be sure to find it out independently of my aid."

"I shall probably, at any rate, have time before me; for I don't think, Addy, I shall hurry back to Europe."

"Then you will marry again here. There, dear, don't sigh, and make me afraid you are going to weep. I don't mean to shock you, still less to hurt your feelings. But you know, darling, it would be absurd to suppose that a pretty, fascinating little woman like you is going to live alone all her life just because

she happened to lose her husband in four-and-twenty."

"I cannot contemplate it, my dear child," said the widow, with a faint smile: "at the same time I am bound to confess I do not feel as if I could always endure the solitude and the want of protection."

"I know nothing about feeling a want of protection," replied Adelaide: "but I quite understand *le besoin d'aimer*, and far more *le besoin d'être aimée*."

"You won't mind what I am going to say, Addy. I am myself only a widow of a few months, and therefore if I can talk in the confidence of friendship to you as I have done, there can be no harm in my alluding in the same way to another in a like position. The only man I can think of as fit to kiss the tips of your fingers is my handsome and widowed landlord."

When Adelaide felt anything very deeply it was not in her nature to blush, but to turn deadly pale. The former would have betrayed

her in the white evening light; the latter might pass unobserved. For a moment she paused, and then replied quite calmly—

"I should not like to be a step-mother; besides, you must remember I was the friend of his wife."

"*Raison de plus, ma chère,*" answered the widow. But Adelaide had risen from her chair, and was pulling down some of the scented, trumpet-shaped blossoms of a large catalpa-tree, which grew close to where they were sitting. "Then the coast is clear for me," thought the scheming little widow to herself with a chuckle of delight; "and if he can be got to care for me I think I might ultimately fall in love with those deep brown eyes."

She had seen her landlord more than once since she had come to the small house, though she had as yet slept there only one night; but it was very close to his abode, and in his fear lest anything material to her comfort might be wanting, he had come himself to look after sundry small matters. She thought him charm-

ing; and if only she could prevent Adelaide becoming a rival here was at once a most interesting chapter of life opening before her. She had been entirely thrown off the right scent by Adelaide's self-possessed manner, and probably more easily than if she had been a less interested observer; and so she retired to rest, after warmly embracing her friend, to dream of the brown eyes, and speculate on the possibility of some time hence, when it should be right and proper in both of them, endeavouring to console her charming landlord.

Two hours later, that same landlord was standing under the catalpa-tree. At its foot he picked up three freshly-gathered trumpet flowers laid in a triangle on the turf—the signal that all was well, and that he was expected. A moment more, and Adelaide was in his arms.

CHAPTER III.

KEEP IT DARK.

"NO, Charles, it will never do to confess it now. There is nothing to be gained by going back upon the past in the reckless way you propose; and there may be much to lose."

"But consider, Adelaide, I cannot always keep my marriage a secret from my father. There is the existence of the poor little boy to testify to it; and what better moment could I find to make a clean breast of it than the present, when he will be too much taken up with his own affairs to care about my past imprudences; which, after all, have come to an end by the death of poor Annie."

"You are wrong, Charles. He is full now of

his own success, and his pomp and pride about marrying into a noble family; and your confession would come with a great shock at the present moment. Wait awhile, till he has made the discovery that women with handles to their names are only women after all. Then he may hear you with more patience; and as the past is dead and buried, he may not so much care about it. After all, your son will be whatever you choose to make him, no matter whether his mother was a dairy-maid or a duchess. I would as soon encounter a turkey-cock with expanded tail, as come across your father just as he is going to marry an Honourable."

"You are very witty, my darling, with your quaint way of putting things. By-the-by, Adelaide, I wonder where you got all your knowledge of the world, never having lived out of a coffee plantation."

"I got it where women get the only kind of knowledge that has any charm for you men—out of my mother-wit, of course. That is always talent enough for a woman to possess, so long

as she has plenty of it. Would you really care one whit more for me, darling, if I could speak four languages, play two instruments, and dance the tarantella?"

"Yes—that last would add greatly to my appreciation of you, you absurd creature. What put it into your head? Do you so much as know what it means?"

"Well, yes, I think I do. It is an Italian dance; and any day I can dance you the Portuguese version of it, which, I suspect, is pretty much the same thing, I wonder, Charley dear, whether it ever strikes you to remember that through my mother I am half a Portuguese?"

"Who could forget it with these long black locks hanging over their arm?" replied Charles, raising the perfumed rope of tresses to his lips at the same time. "Do you remember your mother?"

"Oh! no, I was a baby when she died. Nanny talks to me about her sometimes. She was very beautiful; but I don't fancy she was an easy person to live with. I suspect she

had a temper, which her daughter inherits, my dear, though you have not yet found it out. I believe my father and she used to have terrible scenes."

"Is that all Nanny ever told you of your mother?" asked Charles, in whose memory the gentle image of his dead mother lay enshrined as something sacred.

"Very nearly all. Only she had seen her dance very often; and as all these Indian women are very imitative, and very flexible and graceful, she had learnt the Portuguese dances from my mother, and used to teach them to me when I was little. My father was fond of my mother in spite of their quarrels—that is, he was very much in love with her; and she used to perform the dances of her country to amuse him. I can't quite express what I mean, Charles; but I have always had a sort of idea my mother's life with my father was more like that of a mistress than a wife. I cannot make out that she had much influence over him, or much real control over the household, beyond

giving peremptory orders, and flying into a passion if they were not attended to."

"And yet, Addy, they were married?"

"Oh! dear, yes. My father has shown me her marriage certificate, and a long account of the wedding, with the names of all who were present. Mrs. Johnstone was one of them; and she has often told me how beautiful my mother looked, and how charmed everybody was with her graceful and foreign manner."

"Tell me, darling. Your mother must have been a Catholic. Were you baptised into that Church?"

"Of course I was. I am a Catholic. You don't mind, do you?"

"It makes no difference to me what you are, so long as you are my darling, and will always love me. But do you know anything about it?"

"Certainly not; or at least very little. I believe I have some books that belonged to my mother; and when I was very little there was an attempt made to teach me my catechism. It did not lead to much."

"What, then, are your religious views, my beautiful Panther?" said Charles, in a jesting tone, as he looked down on the lovely face that nestled near him.

"Very much what you might expect from a panther—a great love of life, a great desire to enjoy it, and a profound admiration for its own beautiful stripes. If I have a God it is the god of nature. And if I acknowledge a law, it is the law of loving you."

"I ask no other creed. Stick to that, Addy, and you will always find me ready to say 'Amen!'"

"But you have different notions yourself, haven't you, Charles? I know you go very regularly to the church in your village near, and where—like all the churches here—the smell of the natives is so dreadful that the few times I attempted it I had to come away."

"Why, you little Papist, you had no business there at all."

"I know I had not. And no doubt it was the effluvium of heresy which made it so in-

tolerable to me. But you do go, don't you?"

"Yes. I like going to church. It reminds me of my mother."

"And that reminds me of your father. What are we really going to do about this dreadful letter of his? Will you take my advice, and answer it without saying anything about the past?"

"I don't quite see the force of your argument, Adelaide."

There was a pause. Adelaide raised her head, and sat a little away from him. Then, in a colder, altered tone, she said,

"I don't believe, Charles, that you love as I do."

"What can you mean, my darling? And how can anything I have said lead to so strange and unlikely a conclusion?"

He put his arms round her to draw her closer; but she pouted, and would not yield.

"You are so full of the first part of your father's letter that you seem to have forgotten the concluding sentences, and how the advice

he gives you, or rather the commands he lays on you, are in direct opposition to our interests —to mine, at least. If, in replying to your father, you are to acknowledge that your first wife was not nobly born, nor even well connected; if you are to own to a Jamaica-formed marriage, and a Jamaica-born son, in the face of your father's vehement denunciation of such an event, how are you going to tell him that you are on the point of doing the same thing a second time, and that again you are going to wed the daughter of a planter? Your father would be likely enough to care very little for the long list of noble Portuguese names that my poor mother claimed in her ancestry. I suppose you know my father was nothing but a country attorney, and *you* are going to marry his daughter. Is *that* a proper theme for a letter to your father in answer to his?"

Charles watched her with undisguised admiration. He could see her eyes flashing in the bright moonlight; and she looked like some pagan Sibyl at the moment of inspiration.

"There is another passage in your father's letter which it seems to me you take very coolly. He wants you back in England. Now, that cannot be. You told me the other night, when Annie lay in her coffin, that we could not possibly be married till the year was up. And that, if we were, all the world would hoot at us. I care little about its hooting, but I suppose you, as a man, might feel differently."

"It is generally the woman, Addy, who is supposed to shrink the most from the world's censure."

"Is it? I know nothing of your conventionalities, and I care little what people say of me. If I thought it wrong to love, I should think it wrong to marry you. But as it is I do not see, and for the life of me cannot understand, why we are to make ourselves miserable for twelve months, to please people we know and care nothing about. However, I am not going to argue that point, because, in the first place, it is not for me to hurry on the day which will enable you to call me wife; but this one thing

I have a right to say—namely, that I am not going to consent to your returning to Europe without me. I know nothing of that far-off land save by report; and as you are my own and only treasure, I cannot allow you so far out of my grasp, and so distant from my sight. That something which, one day when you were in a pious mood, you were pleased to call Providence, has saved me from any call to go off with you while your poor wife was living. I don't care now, Charles, to degrade myself in your eyes by reminding you of that rash promise of mine. Thank God, there is no occasion for it now! But you owe me, as a man to a woman, a debt of love and gratitude for having so flung myself at your feet. And the only way you can repay me is by not leaving me. You must give up returning to England until you can take me there."

"And if I find that I cannot, Adelaide, without making my father angry?"

"Oh! then," she said with a little laugh, "it is very easy to choose between your father and

me. If you prefer the former, go back to Europe, and, so far as I am concerned, you need not be at the trouble to return to Jamaica."

"Do you mean, Adelaide, that you would not wait for me?"

"Wait for you! I wait for no one. I do not mean to say that I should be engaged to another man by the time you came back. But I would see you dead at my feet before I would allow you had any further claim on me, if you were once to leave me."

"Why are you to be so different from other women, Addy? No other woman would take offence at being asked to trust her lover out of her sight for a few months, and especially when so much may depend upon it."

"If you mean to judge me by the laws which govern other women, you may leave me for others. I will be meted with no measure, I will be governed by no rules, save those of my own heart. That heart I have given to you. If you care for it, take it and keep it, once and for all; if not, you are free to go whither you

please; but you will return to me no more."

She had risen from the ground as she spoke, and drawn herself up to her full height. Charles looked up at her, as he sat on the ground leaning against the trunk of the tree, with admiration not unmixed with misgiving. He thought to himself, "This is a woman's freak—the ebullition of a hot, passionate nature. I must deal with her as I would with a wild colt, or with the creature of the forest and the wilderness to which she is so pleased I should compare her." So without speaking he drew himself nearer and nearer, till he brought his face close to the little feet that lay hid beneath the folds of her white dress. Imagine the thrill that coursed through his veins when he found them shoeless, stockingless, and like white rose-tinted shells gleaming in the grass, warm and soft beneath his lips! It was more than enough. Eve had conquered. Every consideration broke down before that accident.

"My darling! my darling!" he said at last, throwing his arms round her as with a sudden

panic. "You will catch your death of cold! How could you be so imprudent?"

"It is nothing," she quietly replied, and again seating herself by his side, the little feet were coiled far out of sight beneath the long robe. The peace and the agreement were made and ratified. Charles would not return to England. A letter was to be written to his father, making some plausible excuse for the delay which had already occurred, and urging that the condition of the property, particularly of the newly-cultivated lands, rendered his absence most unadvisable. He would come over the moment he could do so at all prudently; for he should be anxious to offer his respects to the lady whom his father was about to marry, and whom he remembered with great admiration when he was but a lad. He entered very fully into particulars connected with the thriving Jamaica property, as though to lend colour to the assertion that it would be unadvisable he should absent himself. He thanked his father very warmly for the interest he expressed in his own settle-

ment in life, and said it deserved serious consideration. Of the past events, which had been so diametrically opposite to his father's wishes, and of the future prospects, which could be scarcely less so, not one word was said. Nor did the little infant cry, which might be heard in the house as he happened to be writing the letter, find the faintest echo in its pages.

Adelaide and Charles passed another half-hour in the soft moonlight. The little storm of passion which had been the main incident of their meeting had given place to one of those lulls of feeling and dialogue which prove that the chains (by whichever lover worn, and it is rare that both are equally manacled) are riveted tighter than ever. They went over again the ground of their previous conversation, bringing out point after point in stronger relief. Charles spoke a little of his mother, in reference to his father's marrying again. Adelaide reverted to hers.

"It was curious your father showing you their marriage certificate," said he. "I never thought

of having a copy of mine. But, by-the-by, I think Annie had one. I wonder what she did with it. I suppose it is lost, for I never found it among her papers when I looked them over and burnt them the other day."

"That's lucky," said Adelaide to herself, barely realizing what she meant.

A faint white light appeared in the east. A few half-sleepy chirpings were heard in the branches overhead. The labourers would soon be making their appearance, and it would be fatal to delay another moment. In less than ten minutes Adelaide was fast asleep in her hammock. Charles lay awake in his, and smoked a cigar.

"You look a little pale this morning, my dear girl," said Mrs. Oswald, as she kissed the forehead of her guest on her coming down to breakfast.

"I did not go to sleep till very late last night, and I felt so unwilling to get up."

"Then why did you not have the coffee served

upstairs, and I would have come and sat by you. I was very tired with moving furniture and unpacking, so I was asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow. But I was woke by the noise of the birds. We are so surrounded by trees that it is like living in an aviary. I pleased myself with thinking how lucky I was to have fallen on such a charming spot; and from being terribly out of spirits, as I was yesterday, I feel quite lively this morning, and disposed to be pleased with everything. Then, dear Adelaide, you know I owe this pretty cottage to your kindness."

"How do you make that out, Georgie?"

"Why, it was you told Mr. Falkener how much I was in want of a home of my own. I should never have ventured to ask him to let me rent it, because everybody said he had refused again and again either to let or lend it. People supposed he wanted it for a second man of business—some one to assist Mr. Williams in the management of his large property, for it

seems Mr. Williams is getting a little infirm and lazy."

"Mr. Falkener," replied Adelaide, "is so active himself in the supervision of his estate that I should doubt his requiring two agents. At any rate I happened to know he would be willing to let the cottage, and so I sent him word I thought it would suit you. It is everything to me, you know, to have you for so near a neighbour."

"And I cannot tell you what it is to me to have a change from the society of those dear good Johnstones. Mrs. Johnstone is so vulgar, and Sarah so snappish, that it is no sinecure to live with them for long, as you would have found, my dear, if you had happened to marry into the family."

"Oh! I never could have borne going on always with the women of the family—indeed they formed one of my great objections to poor Johnstone. It must be a bore to hate your husband's mother and sister."

"By-the-by, my dear Addy, I hear Mr. Fal-

kener's father is going to marry again. Quite an old man, I suppose?"

"Oh! no, he's not so very old. He is only about fifty, and Mr. Charles Falkener does not seem to think that's at all too old for a man to marry. But then the lady is only thirty, which to my mind makes it quite shocking."

"Ah! my dear, you'll find, as you grow older, that there are no two questions in the world upon which one's opinions change so much as upon when people may be said to be old, and what people ought to marry."

"But I suppose, Georgie, if you ever thought of marrying again, you would only marry a man about your own age?"

"I really cannot tell, my dear. Of course I should prefer it; but there might be circumstances that would induce me to marry a man twenty years older. You know a man of forty-five is not an old man."

"Nonsense, Georgie!—I don't believe you would do anything of the sort. He would have grey hairs—think of that!"

"Oh! you baby, what if he had? I suppose *you* would not, for instance, marry a widower, let him be ever so young?"

Adelaide blushed.

"That would depend upon a good many things, and chiefly on the terms he had been on with his first wife."

"You don't mean to say that, if they had lived like cat and dog, you would not be afraid of snarling and scratching if you accepted the dead pussy's place?"

"Of course," said Adelaide gravely, "if he had been a really bad husband, I should be afraid to venture; but if he had only not been very much in love with his wife I could put up with him. The one thing I could not bear would be the having to be jealous of his first love."

"Well, my dear, to descend from generalities to particulars, supposing other things did not interfere, the apprehension you have alluded to would never come between you and Mr. Falkener."

Adelaide looked angry.

"What right have you, Georgie, to talk to me about that man *à brûle-pourpoint*, in this way? I cannot see why you should couple his name with mine."

"Forgive me, dearest!" exclaimed Mrs. Oswald, starting from her chair and kneeling down before her friend, whose hands she clasped in hers as she looked anxiously up into Adelaide's downcast and clouded face. "I did not mean to annoy you. I was really only quoting an instance, giving an example, because it happened to be so close at hand, but without any idea of making a personal remark."

"Why, what do you know, Georgie, about Mr. Falkener and his first wife?"

"I only know what all the world knows, or pretends to know—that it was a *mésalliance*—that her grandmother, or great-grandmother, or somebody, was a negress; and even they *do* affirm that he was never legally married to her."

"You don't mean to say that she was only his mistress?"

"I should be very sorry to assert anything of the kind, my dear; and I daresay the poor young thing was deceived, though of course Mr. Falkener must have known what he was about. But it does seem doubtful whether it was a real *bonâ fide* marriage."

"Surely, Georgie, a woman must know whether or not she drove or walked to church, and heard the marriage service read."

"Yes, my dear; but if it were not read by a real clergyman, but only somebody dressed up as one, and if it were not done in a church, but in a private room, without a special licence, the woman, you see, might be deceived, while the man who planned it would know he might disown her whenever he pleased."

"And do people really say that of the late Mrs. Charles Falkener?"

"They say it so much, my dear, and it is so generally believed, that I have heard people express surprise at her being a friend of yours.

Of course I knew it was all perfect innocence on your part; and that probably Mr. Snowden, if he had ever heard it, did not believe it, and so would not warn you against her. But I am not at all sure that the *other* thing was not even more fatal to her than any opinion of a left-handed connection could be."

"What other thing?"

"The supposition that she had black blood. Mr. Falkener always presented her as his wife, and Mr. Falkener is a gentleman whose word, given or implied, should be taken. But the black blood was a thing nobody could overlook, and that was the reason she was so little asked out into society."

"I always thought it was her bad health that kept her at home."

"Of course, in a great measure it was, my dear. But I, who have had opportunities of hearing the matter discussed, know very well that, whatever her health might have been, she would not have received one invitation where you and I had twenty."

"I had certainly heard something of this before, Georgie, but I did not suppose it was anything more than idle gossip. To tell you the truth, I am much more inclined to believe that she was not really married than that there was a taint in her blood."

"Are you indeed?" said Georgie, with the alacrity of a gossipmonger; "and why, my dear?"

"It is not very easy to describe, and I am not sure that I should like to give all my reasons; but there certainly *was* something in the relations of Mrs. Falkener and her husband, or supposed husband, which I never could quite understand. She was very fond of him, I think, but she was afraid of him, and very inferior to him in mind and education. All this is natural enough on the supposition that they were not really married; and the fact that he rather neglected her, or, more correctly speaking, seemed bored with her, would bear out the same supposition. On the other hand, Annie used frequently to talk to me about her

family, and her connections, in a way she could not have done if she had even suspected people said she was of the origin you suppose."

"And who were her family connections?"

"They were Scotch. Her mother was a Miss Macdonald, a distant connection of the Lord of the Isles. Her father's name was Macpherson. He came to Jamaica first when Annie was a year old. And as for her grandfather and grandmother, why, they never were here in their lives. Her maternal grandmother was a Miss Desmond—Irish, and very beautiful. I have forgotten the names of the others. But what settles the question at once is that Annie was a year old before her father ever came to Jamaica, and that her grandfather lived and died in Scotland. How it all shows, Georgie, the horrid scandal of the world; for, after all, it would have been so easy for people to find out the date of Mr. Macpherson's arrival in Jamaica, before they located the whole family here for generations back and made one of them a black woman."

"That is quite true, my dear. But you must remember that Mr. Macpherson, though he may have been quite a gentleman, and belonging, for aught I know, to a good old Scotch family, was a very poor man. He had, I believe, something to do with the shipping at Kingston. Mrs. Falkener was left an orphan, and put to school somewhere. Mr. Falkener thought proper to run away with her; and then it was nobody's business to find out who and what she was; but the whole affair predisposed people to be ill-natured. And so you really think, Addy, she was not married?"

"I don't go so far as to say *that*. I only say there certainly was something I never could understand. Only I am quite sure it was not anything to do with Annie's ancestry."

"Then it could only have been something to do with her marriage."

"After all, Georgie, it might be nothing more than that they were ill-suited to each other. Annie had married very young. She had had very little education, and no experience or

knowledge of the world. She was, therefore, very ill-suited to be the wife of a man like Mr. Falkener; and though I always looked upon her as my friend, yet I never could understand what he had seen in her to make him marry her. I think this is quite reason enough why she should have seemed afraid of him, and he be accused of neglecting her, without its following that there was really anything wrong."

"My dear Adelaide," replied Mrs. Oswald, in her gravest and most convincing tones, "there is never smoke where there is no fire. Depend upon it there was *something* not quite correct in that quarter."

And so Annie Falkener's reputation was sacrificed to an old proverb, like that of so many other women who have preceded and will follow her.

Adelaide sat musing. Charles had spoken of Annie's "marriage lines." But they were lost —so he said. Had they ever existed? She debated with herself whether some day she should ask him, and she decided in the nega-

tive. It was more in accordance with her state of feeling that the doubt should remain unsolved. A falsehood will often make a better weapon than the truth, only we must be able to make pretence we believe in it. To effect this we must leave one little door ajar, through which we may make our escape into the wide fields of conjecture. Once beyond the hedgings-in of stern fact, we may wander far ahead, even beyond the bounds of probability, without burdening our consciences with so odious a thing as a downright lie. In her inmost heart she believed not a word about Annie's marriage not being quite valid. Charles was not the man to deceive any woman in such a way. She wondered that Mrs. Oswald could have seen him and spoken to him once, and then couple such an idea with her hero. She did not know that minds like Mrs. Oswald's will allow a great deal of good and evil to filter through them, without ever producing the residuum of a real conviction. She would declare her positive belief in one thing at noon, and

speak with hesitation about it at sunset. Her judgments of others, if uncharitable, were seldom malicious. She did, of course, a great deal of mischief at times because she was incautious. But there was no poison under her lips; and to those who knew the worth of her changeable assertions, one word dropped by Sarah Johnstone had more venom in it than a thousand gaily rattled forth by the little widow. If Annie Falkener had been still alive, Mrs. Oswald's solemn convictions as to the connection between smoke and flame would have done little or nothing, other considerations apart, to influence her conduct towards that poor lady. If others did not throw stones she would not begin; and if they were only doubtful pebbles that her neighbours sent flying at the unfortunate butt, she would as nearly as possible close her eyes to them, and hope there was nothing serious in it. If an acquaintance were agreeable or convenient, she would have been greatly annoyed to make the discovery that it was not also quite proper. She certainly

always hoped for the best when it became necessary seriously to decide on the merits of the case.

Meanwhile she was not averse to allowing herself and affording her friends the little excitement of presuming there might be a spice of that delightful mystery of iniquity hidden in corners where no one suspected it. At any rate she enjoyed the chase after a hunted reputation; but she did not in cold blood step out of her way to be in at the death, and gloat over the agonies of the quarry.

Adelaide very readily perceived that, in denouncing Mrs. Falkener's union with her supposed husband as something illegal, Mrs. Oswald had failed to see that she was at the same time ruining Mr. Falkener's reputation as a man of honour. She could always take a one-sided view of a case when it so pleased her, and had a wonderful way of applying one sauce to the goose and denying it to the gander.

Adelaide would not press the matter. She

did not want to be roused into a warm defence of Charles Falkener; and she was quite well aware that in her secret heart Mrs. Oswald thought him perfect. Adelaide neither wanted to disguise her friend's sense of Charles's merits, nor to open her eyes to the fact that she was in love with him herself; and it would have been very difficult to conceal that fact had she taken up the cudgels in his behalf. Neither woman had thoroughly deceived the other; Mrs. Oswald more than suspected that Adelaide's friendship for Annie was nothing but a feint to conceal her affection for Falkener. She had not for a moment been taken in by Adelaide's assertion the previous evening that she would not like to be a step-mother. What had a baby more or less to do with the matter? It was quite enough that Adelaide did not make Mr. Falkener a subject of easy and flowing conversation, for there to be "something in it."

On the other hand Adelaide saw quite clearly that the widow was ready and willing to marry again. She professed herself that she would

not be so very difficult to please. If she would accept a nice, grey-headed old gentleman of fifty, was she likely to shrink from the young Adonis who lived at her very gate? She had tried to prove too much in the high value she put on elderly men; and she had gone too far in the disinterestedness with which she had, as Adelaide complained, thrust his name before her.

Probably neither of the women analysed and anatomised their sentiments as we are doing for them; but they separated with an instinct, complete and perfect, of what each felt, thought, and wished. And they embraced and parted with the tenderest assurances of affection and promises of meeting again very shortly. It was a promise sure to be kept, because neither could thoroughly play out her little game, at that particular juncture, without the presence of the other.

CHAPTER IV.

ROBINS AND WRENS.

IT was not to be expected that Adelaide would submit to a quiet, monotonous life during the entire twelvemonths that Charles Falkener required to mourn his wife's death. When she had first made his acquaintance, and had been fascinated by his manner and good looks, she was only just beginning to taste the delights of going into society, and to learn the value of her beauty and talents, and the power that they gave her.

Mr. Snowden was extremely proud of his daughter, and, in his way, very fond of her; but he had no notion of making his home pleasant and agreeable to her. Absorbed in the

business connected with his property, devoted to making money, though all with a view to Adelaide's future, and for the rest of his time drinking brandy and soda-water, he was nothing of a companion to her. He felt his deficiences quite enough to be anxious that his daughter should soon form a good marriage, and deliver him from all further responsibility of looking after her.

When the Johnstone affair was at an end he found himself in a great dilemma. That project had offered all he cared to secure in a marriage for his child. He had failed, and what was he to do now? Not being a man to make any change in his usual mode of life, being partly too selfish, and partly, in his way, too occupied, he merely guzzled and grumbled, drank more brandy and less soda-water, and left Adelaide more than ever to her own devices. But meanwhile Adelaide was learning something of the world, and becoming more conscious of the part she might play in it. She determined upon making some great effort,

several efforts if need be, to bring about a complete alteration at the Cedars—the name of her father's house. She began by taking Mrs. Oswald into her confidence, and they resolved together upon an entire domestic reformation, begun on Adelaide's behoof, but in the advantages of which Mrs. Oswald was to have her full share, because she would be so useful as a chaperon for Adelaide. The first year of her widowhood was now at an end, for she had discarded the cap and worn the rebellious ringlets for several months before she hired Mr. Falkener's cottage. The palest of greys, and a large infusion of white, now entered into her toilet. Indeed, in the deepest grief black was, to say the least, inconvenient in that hot climate, and quite insupportable for what Europeans would consider a proper time for wearing weeds.

"You see, my dear Georgie, there is no reason on earth why you should not spend by far the larger portion of your time up at the Cedars with me, instead of down here alone. By-the-

by, what do you call this pretty little place?"

"The Wren's Nest. Mr. Falkener and I decided on that name a week ago; and I, you see, am the wren, which character will account for the sobriety of my dress for some time to come."

"You really must, my dear Wren, be with me a great deal. I don't mind saying anything to you; and the fact is—though you probably know it already—my poor father's house is not one for a girl like me to receive guests in all by myself."

"Oh! yes, I know that, and have often pitied you so for it. But perhaps, my dear, he might not like me to be constantly with you. He might come to look upon me as an interloper."

"That shows you don't know papa at all. He is so fond of ladies—pretty ladies like you, Wren. I know you might get no end of influence over him."

"He might say I was setting my cap at him."

"Oh! how I wish you would. That would

be delightful! What a darling little step-mother you would be! Only I am not quite sure, dear Wren, that I should like to have to give up to you in everything. I have been my own mistress all my life."

"Besides, Addy, you know there would be the grey hairs, which you think I could never get over."

"Oh! papa is only a very little grey. But what nonsense we are talking! Do let us go back to our muttons. What I want to do, dear, is to have plenty of dinner-parties."

"Then you must begin by inviting me."

"That's capital! The first shall be for next Thursday. I shall tell papa it is all settled; and I will have the Marshalls, and Mr. Standing, and the two Jacksons, and Mr. Marsh, and old Mr. Neville, because he keeps papa in good humour."

Adelaide went home, determined to carry her point. She was wearied to death at those dreadful tête-à-tête dinners with her father; but she looked forward to that of this evening with

eagerness, because it would give her the opportunity of laying her plans before Mr. Snowden. When they sat down to table, Adelaide perceived that her father's brow was clouded, and that there was a probability of his being more silent than usual. She took but little notice so long as dinner lasted; but when the servants were gone, and the dessert and wine were on the table, she poured out his glass herself, and moved her chair a little nearer to him.

"You are not well to-night, papa?"

"I am worried and harassed, as I well may be with such a rascally lot as I have got about me. I don't think any man was ever cursed with such a set of thieves before."

"Nanny, for instance, papa, eh?"

"You know very well I don't mean Nanny. She has her faults—amongst others spoiling you. But she is as honest as the day."

"Has anything really happened in the house to make you suspect any of the servants?"

"Yes—I have missed money out of the drawer of my writing-desk. You know it has a set of

drawers on either side. I generally keep small sums in a purse in the top drawer to the left. Once or twice when I have taken out the purse I have been startled at not finding as much as I felt sure, or almost sure, I had left in it. But it seemed impossible it could be so, as in each instance the drawer was locked. But now I don't know what to think. I can take my oath that yesterday morning I left thirty dollars and ten peccayunes; to-night I find only eighteen dollars and six peccayunes."

"Are you sure the key is good, and that you really did lock the drawer?"

"I am quite certain it was locked. For I was in a great hurry to get out some money to send after a messenger that had come from Bar's-down with a letter for me. Long Jack was waiting in my room for the money, and in my hurry I pulled the handle of the door hard, forgetting it was locked, and then of course had to go to my watch-chain for this key to unlock it. I saw at once the money in the purse

was less than I expected to find it. I gave three dollars to Jack, and then set myself to count what was remaining."

"But how can you be so sure, papa, that you remember the exact sum that was in the purse?"

"Because the last time I opened that drawer and handled the purse it was empty, till I put into it the change that was brought me from paying a bill of Wallace's. I counted the change—nine dollars and fifteen peccayunes, put it into the purse, and locked the drawer."

"When was that?"

"Yesterday morning, at half-past ten."

"Who has been into the room since?"

"How the deuce should I know? Dinah the housegirl, I suppose; and Long Jack, to put out my things, or answer my call, and Nanny of course, and very likely you."

"No, I've not been there. Besides, if I had I should not have touched your drawers."

"Of course not. I am only enumerating the people that may have been in."

Adelaide sat meditating. She evidently wanted to say something, and did not know how to bring it out.

"When did you fancy you had lost money before?"

"Oh, two or three times. I cannot be sure of the days. Yes, on Monday last I thought I missed eight dollars. You know I never keep large sums in that drawer."

"Last Monday——What were you doing Sunday night?"

"Nothing particular. I dined alone with you. And you sang to me. We went to bed early, I think. Why do you ask so particularly?"

"Because, dear papa—you won't mind my saying it—but sometimes, you know—"

And she rapped the glass before him with her knuckles.

"You mean that sometimes I take a glass too much. But, d—— it, girl, I don't open my own drawers in my cups and rob myself."

Adelaide laughed, and putting one arm round his neck, kissed him, for she could be very fond and full of play with him when she was in a good humour, and thus she riveted her hold over him and made him obedient.

"Of course I don't suppose you do that. But sometimes, you know, you are very sleepy; I may say you are asleep. And then Long Jack helps you to bed, and he takes up your watch; and then you cannot very well tell what he does with it, while you are half or quite asleep."

Mr. Snowden could bear a great deal from Adelaide, but this description of himself in his frequent states of more than semi-intoxication came too near the truth to be pleasant. He pushed his chair further from her, and an angry flush passed over his face.

"No, no. I know pretty well what I am about, and I know Jack since before you were born, and he knows me. Jack would no more dare take advantage of me than he would cut his hand off. Besides, Jack is no thief."

"I cannot think, papa, why you are so fond of Jack. I don't believe you can see any fault in that great, big, ungainly nigger. For my part, I hate him."

"How so?"

"Oh, no matter. I am not sure that I know myself. Besides, I believe it is mutual. There is no love lost between us."

"Whenever you have any real fault to find with one of the servants, Addy, you know I am always ready to listen. But I cannot understand why you should dislike Jack. He is a faithful servant, and moreover a very sharp fellow. I have great confidence in him."

"Perhaps it is the sharpness I object to," said Adelaide, *sotto voce*; and then turning the subject, "But seriously, dear father, who can it be that takes your money?"

"That is what I wish you would find out for me. Meanwhile I shall not say anything about it, because if we make a row we shall fail to detect the thief. I shall continue to leave small sums in that drawer, making very sure of how

much I do leave; and I shall look very often to see if it is safe. Then, if one day any is missing, it will only be to discover who can have entered my room that day for us to get at a glimpse of the truth."

"Then I had better not say anything even to Nursie."

"Certainly not. It is your secret and mine, my beauty," said the fond father, giving her cheek a rather hard pinch as he again drew his chair nearer to hers.

"Ah, it's all very well to call me Beauty; but poor Beauty has a dull time of it up at the Cedars, I can tell you."

"Why, what's in the wind now?"

"Nothing is in the wind. I wish there were even any wind, for then I might test the truth of the proverb, 'It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good.'"

"Something has put you out, Addy, why don't you tell me what it is?"

"I am not put out, father, but I do think it is

a little hard that you let me be shut up all my life, going nowhere, seeing nobody. It's hard upon a young girl like me."

Mr. Snowden was taken aback, and knew not what to reply. Here was a grave accusation, and one that, whichever way he took it, might lead to serious results. Moreover, he knew his daughter's temper too well to dare treat her complaints with indifference. Adelaide was a young lady of many resources, and it would not be altogether safe to pay no heed to her wishes whatever they might be, and leave things to take their course.

"You mean, I suppose, that you are getting tired of your old father, and want to get away from home."

"Now that's exactly what I do *not* mean; and if you had intended to express the very reverse of my real meaning, you could not have done it in better terms. I am not tired of my father, be he young or old, as he chooses to call himself, and I am particularly anxious to stay at home."

"That's my own dear girl! then what is it you do want?"

"I want a little life, a little amusement, such as other girls of my age are allowed. I get moped never seeing anybody to speak to."

"Well, I don't know about that; you are always flying off to Mrs. Oswald, down in her pen below. I am sure I cannot think what you two women can find to say to each other day after day."

"There, papa, you have just hit it, and you may well wonder. But it is the Wren's Nest she lives in, and we call her Mrs. Wren. Why don't you get a few robins to talk to the wrens, and make things a little merrier for us?"

"Really, Addy," said Mr. Snowden smiling, "I don't know what I have to do with adding to the mirth of Mrs. Wren, as you call her. Besides, she has only been a widow about a year, and would probably be quite scandalised if I were so much as to hint about robins."

"Then that shows you know nothing about

Wrens. But you forget there is poor I. At least I should enjoy a little hop with the robins, but you never invite any upon your lawn."

"The fact is, my pretty bird, you made such a dreadful tragedy of my first attempt to bring you out into society, that I have never since had the courage to think of anything further. I assure you, Adelaide, I am very far from having got over that business about Johnstone, whatever you may feel."

"Come, now, that's too bad of you, father," exclaimed the high-tempered girl, as she started from her seat and began pacing up and down the room, her arms folded across her bosom, her head flung a little back, and her fine face flushed with excitement. "I can never begin to talk to you about myself, or allude to my future prospects, but you bring up the past and fling it in my teeth. Why cannot you let bygones be bygones? Perhaps you would like me to put on deep mourning, give out to all the world that I am heartbroken, and never

mean to marry any man, because that half-drunken boy insulted me, and then chose to fight a duel and get himself killed. Was that my fault?"

"Well, well, I did not say it was. I only remembered, or meant to remark, that in that particular case I thought everything was so promising, and that you were all but settled for life."

"That is all past and gone, father. And it is of no use crying over spilt milk—or spilt blood either, for the matter of that."

"You are a strange, wild, outspoken girl. Not that I love you the less for that. And now tell me what it is you want?"

She stopped short in her walk, and stood before him in an attitude betokening an entire change of feeling; she stooped forward, her arms hanging, her hands crossed, and her face radiant with girlish merriment.

"What I want, father, is to be allowed to amuse myself. You are to give dinners, and I am to invite the guests; and we are to dance,

and I am to sing. In short, I *must* have a little fun of some sort or other."

Mr. Snowden shook his head, but in a way rather to give encouragement than otherwise.

"I am afraid a poor old man like me is hardly fit to preside over such banquets and balls as a madcap like you is likely to require. And then how the devil am I to *chaperon* a giddy girl? Why, it would require the wisdom of a whole committee of old women!"

"Nonsense, papa! I won't have any old women come near the place. Wren will do it all. Wren is a widow, highly respectable, and all that sort of thing; and you are to have her here whenever we give any large party, you know—not, of course, always when you and I just ask a friend or two to look in. I have spoken to Wren about it. She made some demurs at first, but I talked her over, and told her I should settle everything with you."

"I am afraid Mrs. Wren is a very young *chaperon*, and more likely to be amusing herself than to be looking after you."

"I don't want to be looked after. It is only that two women are better than one for things of that kind."

"What kind may you mean?"

"The kind that leads to being amused, and making life agreeable. Come, father, you know what I mean, and you are going at once, I can see, to let me settle it all my own way."

"May I at least know when all this is going to begin?"

"Next Thursday you will find yourself giving your first dinner and garden-party."

"And am I really not to know more about it than that one meagre announcement?"

"Oh! yes; by degrees the plot will be developed to you; and probably you will be called upon to provide the sinews of war, to bring grist to the mill, and in various ways to contribute to the success of the undertaking."

"At that rate you will have to keep a sharp look-out on the thief who steals my money, otherwise we shall find we are burning the candle at both ends."

"Trust me for that. I don't mean for burning the candle—though I think I can do that too—but looking out for the thief. You may depend upon it I shall catch him."

"Or her; for we don't even know the sex yet, my dear."

"I am sure it is a man," said Adelaide, with a look of conviction, for she had her own private views with respect to these robberies of which she had that night heard for the first time. After a brief pause Mr. Snowden resumed,

"It is rather a serious thing, Addy, bringing your pretty little widowed Wren about the house."

"I see nothing serious in it at all; no more will you when you know what a merry little Wren it is."

"On the contrary, I am afraid that increases the gravity of the question."

Adelaide was by this time seated on his knee, with one arm round her father's neck.

"Now look here, papa; you just take the goods the gods send you, and make no more

ado. You have no real objection to my friend, Mrs. Oswald. I have heard you say pretty things about her a hundred times. It won't bore you seeing her about the place with me; and depend upon it, we women shall know better what is proper for us to do, and for you not to do, than you will yourself. Trust it all to me."

"I am amused at your assurance. I begin to think fathers are quite out of place. As for grandmothers, they can be of no good but to learn of their descendants how to suck eggs. However, I will promise to be obedient, and to do all it seems I am fit for, namely to provide the tin. You may be leading me to the brink of a precipice, for aught I can tell, down which I shall break my neck; but I suppose I must follow you, will-o'-the-wisp as you are."

And so they talked on to a late hour, Adelaide in one of her most charming moods, and her doting father, in his genial way when not excited with wine, showing his full appreciation of her talents, and his own power of mak-

ing himself agreeable. She sang her best songs that night, adding her powers of mimicry and acting to her beautiful voice.

As she left the room, Mr. Snowden said, following her with his eyes—

"God bless you, my darling! You have wonderful gifts; but I sometimes ask myself what will be the use of them all."

"Crumbs for the robins, father," said the laughing face that peeped round the door, and then vanished.

Mr. Snowden sighed, and, by a natural transition of ideas, sat thinking of the Wren.

Meanwhile, Charles Falkener knew but little of his lady-love's peculiar frame of mind. He was chewing the bitter-sweet cud of many memories and many fancies. A sort of chastened halo was beginning to invest the recollection of the faded rosebud wife he had just buried. His thoughts went forth with a frequent tender yearning towards the small being whose infantine lamentations so frequently filled the

house with a sound that specially brings before us the recollection and the necessity of female presence. He wanted Adelaide as much as a man could want the aid and companionship of a woman, when that man is young, a widower, and a father. But there was something rather poetic than romantic in Charles's sentiments; and possibly there reigned at intervals in Adelaide's mind more of the rage and torment of real passion than ever broke the slumbers or haunted the hours of her lover's daily life. It must be remembered, also, that he *had* lived; for though he was still so young, and his experiences had been so brief, yet he had loved, married, and lost his wife.

With Adelaide, and her bright nineteen years, all of such like experiences were in the vague, glorious, delicious unknown. She had barely raised the cup to her lips—nay, she had done no more than see the sparkling wine bubbling to the brim, and was waiting for her first long thirsty drain of life and love.

The intensity of her ignorant yearnings add-

ed to the natural restlessness of her character; and there was something in the prosaic patience of Charles's year of decent mourning that exasperated her. She did not love him less; she did not less purpose to be his, and his only; but this stagnation was more than she could endure, and she pined for the glare and sound of more stirring scenes. Sometimes she was seized with a frantic jealousy of poor departed Annie, and then she would resolve to wring Charles's heart by admitting the advances of some other man. Sometimes she felt wild with him because he would wait out the year. Why could they not marry at once—secretly, if necessary; anything was better than the dead level to which their lives had sunk. She would be true to him, she said to herself; but she would not spend her days in stagnation. Of course she would not, could not marry another man, or care for another; but meanwhile she would enjoy her own gifts—she would delight in her beauty, and in the power it gave her over others. And she would pour forth her being in

song like a lark, and entrance those who heard her.

Falkener and Adelaide had met more than once at her father's house since that night under the catalpa-tree at the Wren's Nest. Adelaide had suggested that it was very sad and lonely for him to spend all his evenings in his own home, with nothing but that squalling baby near him; and Mr. Snowden had quite acquiesced in his coming up to the Cedars. Unfortunately neither had been content with such amount of intercourse as chatting in her father's presence had afforded them; and after, to all appearance, the guest had departed, and Adelaide had retired to rest, a clandestine meeting would take place in the oleander grove, or in some more distant part of the grounds.

On one occasion Long Jack had the audacity suddenly to make his appearance with Adelaide's handkerchief, which he said he had picked off the ground in the verandah, and feared she might be looking for it. She had taken the incident calmly in that instance,

immediately bidding Charles good night, as if she had only just followed him part of the way to his house, but within her own gardens, and had then returned to the house followed by Jack. But it gave her a renewed uncomfortable feeling about Jack's habits of prying, and of his motives in doing so. She had brooded over it for a day or two, and then arranged to meet Charles in the wood, near the Wren's Nest, and consider with him seriously about matters in general, and the aspect of their affairs.

"Why, Charles, dear, cannot you speak to my father at once, and let everything be open and aboveboard? I cannot think he would wish to oppose our marriage. He used to be disagreeable about you when he thought I had taken a fancy to you before poor Annie died, because he was afraid of its interfering with my marrying. But now what could be his objection? You have fortune, I shall have more; and you know that is what he looks to."

But Falkener was not to be easily persuaded. He did not trust Mr. Snowden's discretion, or

his delicacy, or his power of keeping a secret, any moment that he might get a little elated. He would not for anything that it should be known he was engaged to be married so soon after his first wife's death. He knew he had already done her many wrongs, and at least he would honour her memory. Moreover, he felt strongly his father's letter. His first marriage still unavowed, and of a nature so entirely to displease his father, how was it possible to go and engage himself again, almost immediately after getting that peremptory letter of advice, in a way which, spite of Adelaide's large expectations, would hardly shock and surprise him less.

Charles was obstinate, so Adelaide thought, and she was passionate. She could not enter into his reasons, and she was profoundly hurt at what she thought, or pretended to think, his indifference.

"Do not urge me, my darling. I am weak before my great love of you. But something is due to my father, and something to the sur-

prise that so speedy a re-engagement would occasion if your father were unfortunately to let it out."

"You talk very calmly, Charles, and you take things very easy; but then you must not expect me to run all the risk of these clandestine meetings, just for the sake of allowing you to carry out your own ideas, and I might add, only that I care for you too much to like to say it, your selfish notions."

"My darling, if you and I are to be one, and I make a grave error in judgment, you will suffer with and for me."

"Ah! well," murmured Adelaide to herself, "he does not know what love is as I know it. I suppose it is because it is my first. I could not stand at all these things if I were a man, and had the power of breaking through them as men have."

She broke away from him, discontented and saddened. As she left the thicket she thought she heard footsteps near. She paused and listened. Presently, slowly emerging from a side

path, came Long Jack, his eyes down, his broad straw hat drawn over his brows, as though he saw nothing, and, as usual, humming a tune. He affected to be very much startled at meeting Adelaide, doffed his hat, and with a horrid smirk of his ugly nigger face, exclaimed—

"It is a lucky evening that sees Missy abroad so late. But her wee feet will be wet in the long rank grass. If only Long Jack might have the honour to carry lovely Missy back to her own house." And he advanced as though he meditated taking her in his arms.

Adelaide drew herself up, and said haughtily, "Stand back! What do you want, Jack? What business is it of yours where I am and what I do?"

"Can she ask me that?" exclaimed Jack, casting up his eyes, and so showing the only thing white about him except his teeth. "Haven't I seen her and known her since she was a piccaninny, and carried her in these arms ten thousand times? And now the beautiful Missy will

not let her poor Long Jack lift up her pretty feet out of the damp, and take her back to master, just no more than if Long Jack were a stranger."

He then put on his hat with a look of confident impertinence, and passing on in front of her walked home at a rapid pace, making the woods echo as he went.

"Miss Nancy was a saucy jade,
With ankles slim and tidy,
She slipt at night to meet her blade,
Whose name was Master Friday.

But once too oft Miss Nancy came
A-draggling through the thicket,
She met poor Long Jack straggling home,
And knew that he would nick it.

'Stand off!' says she, as proud could be,
Demonstrating her ire.
Jack bows and goes—'I see,' says he,
'The fat is in the fire.'"

Adelaide's rage knew no bounds. She could not catch all the words any more than she had done on a previous occasion. But the cool, dastardly insolence of the negro was past all

bearing. Accustomed as she was from her birth to the mixture of dreadful astute cunning, sneaking revenge, and servile flattery that make up the character of that unfortunate race, who have learnt, from contact with so-called civilization, nothing but its lowest accompanying vices and its sharpened malice, she was, nevertheless, aghast at the daring of the wretched menial who thus insulted her to her face. Moreover, his way of doing it was so spontaneous, and at the same time so well planned, that it made it almost impossible to complain about it or open her lips to anyone on the subject. She knew well enough that if she spoke to her father the rascally servant would so plead his excuses as to make it appear the whole thing was an accident. He had proffered his services to Missy—had been distressed at the idea she would injure her health by being out at such unseemly hours; and on Missy's refusing to let him see her home, he had bowed and left her, just singing one of the ten thousand ditties which

niggers are always singing, in season and out of season, and which he had picked up somewhere, he could not tell how. "La! Massa knows niggers is always singing, what else should the poor devils do, working hard in the plantations, to amuse themselves? Massa knows Long Jack is not a nigger like other niggers; but still he lives among them and picks up their ways;—no offence meant to Missy, nor to Massa either."

Some such rigmarole, avoiding every point, and slipping like an eel through every accusation, was sure to be the only answer that hours of jobation would get out of Jack. And then to counterbalance it in Mr. Snowden's eyes there would be the man's undeniable merits as a servant. There was not a thing to which he could not turn his hand, from grooming a horse to cooking a first-rate dinner. And besides he had more control over the whole herd of his fellow darkies than any white man could possibly have. What with cajolery and threats, and a thorough understanding of their half

savage and wholly naughty-child nature, he could govern, organize, and discipline a plantation full of niggers, getting a good amount of work out of their incurable idleness, and yet keeping them in good-humour. And there was not a white planter through the length and breadth of Jamaica that, unaided, could accomplish that. They were no longer slaves. The argument of the lash could not now be resorted to, and it was the only argument which a cunning negro like Jack would have found unanswerable.

Adelaide got home positively sick with anger. Nancy was in the secret of her meetings with Falkener, up to a certain point. She knew they did meet, because sometimes she had to assist them, so far as carrying messages went.

Therefore Adelaide was not afraid of betraying herself by relating what had passed. Meanwhile she determined in her secret heart that somehow or other she would bring home that robbery to Jack—at least the suspicion of it; and so try to undermine her father's good opinion

of the man, and his constant personal dependence on him.

This resolution she kept to herself; and with tears of rage, only related to Nancy all that had happened in the wood. Nancy soothed her by promising revenge and swearing secresy; and Adelaide resolved to bide her time.

CHAPTER V.

TWO STRINGS TO YOUR BOW.

"I MUST say that, in my opinion, Snowden makes a great mistake in keeping that fine girl of his in Jamaica. By Jove, she's a stunner! In England she might have made a match with the first in the land. I don't believe there's a born duchess could hold a candle to her!"

This expression of opinion was from the lips of elderly Mr. Neville, who on the evening of Adelaide's garden-party was sauntering along the terrace with old Mr. Marshall. The latter acquiesced in his friend's view of the question.

"I think you are right. Now all my girls

were sent to Europe to finish their education, and never came back to the nest till they had been polished off at a first-class French boarding-school. It was a great sacrifice, of course; but my wife and I always looked to their having a good education like other English girls, away from this enervating climate."

"You did wisely. But Snowden's daughter was born here in Jamaica, and has never left it for a day. It can't be said, however, that the climate has hurt her health, for she is as fine a piece of flesh and blood as you would see anywhere. I suppose Snowden will make her his heir, and will be content with getting her a husband out here."

"No bad look-out either, my dear sir," replied Mr. Marshall.

"Ah, well, that may be; but if I had a girl like that I should like to marry her to a sprig of our good old English nobility. I'd have her called 'my lady,' and wear her coronet, and have a right to send and tell Her Majesty she wishes to say a word to her, which they tell

me any English peeress can do if she like, and the Queen can't refuse to receive her."

"No, no, Mr. Neville, I don't agree with you there. Like should marry like, and those who want coronets should be born in ermine. I should be very well content if one of my girls marries a nice, well-conducted and well-to-do young man like Standing there. He's talking to Miss Adelaide at this moment, and I must say he seems rather sweet on her."

"Well, I suppose she can pick and choose. Standing is a very good fellow; she might do worse. He has improved that property of his wonderfully. It is worth treble what it was in his father's time. You see unfortunately the girl began badly. That duel of poor Johnstone's was a bad business. Standing had to keep out of the way for some time. But those things blow over sooner here than they do across the Atlantic. I suppose there would be a sort of poetic justice in her marrying Standing after he had shot Johnstone."

"I never could make out the rights of that

story, Mr. Marshall. Which of the two men did she encourage? And what caused the duel?"

"Really I don't pretend to know anything of the truth of the matter. My impression is, that it is always very difficult to know who a girl does care for, till she has been spliced. My belief is they don't know themselves. But I think in this case there was no partiality for either. Johnstone was a little screwed, and he wanted to kiss her, which I should think any man, however sober, might take a fancy to do; and Standing came up and prevented it. And then next day they fought. I believe that was pretty nearly all about it. Snowden was very much put about at the time; and a lot of nasty things were said about the poor girl. It was a nine days' wonder, and now people are forgetting it; and pretty Miss Addy looks very much as if she might be inclined to do as I say, and take young Standing."

"She has another chance still nearer home, Mr. Marshall. What say you to young Falken-

er? What a deuced handsome fellow he is, and such a pleasant companion, too! He's very down in the mouth since that poor little woman died."

"Yes, so I am told. Of course, he is not here to-night. Lor', what a place Kingston is, to be sure, for scandal and gossip! And I think the country is, if possible, worse than the town. I suppose you know they said he was not married to her."

"No—you don't mean it? I never heard that; but I did hear she had a drop of black blood somewhere, and I know that kept many people shy of making her acquaintance."

"I heard that too, and I believe one to be as false as the other. Indeed I know positively to the contrary, for I was acquainted with her father and all his family before any of them ever came to Jamaica. The only thing against her was that he ran away with her from school, if you call that anything. She was an orphan, and had hardly a friend in the world; and on the whole she could not do

better than marry a handsome rich young man, with large expectations, if she could catch him."

"But I fancy Falkener never made his marriage known."

"No, not to his father; he told me he had not. His father is enormously rich and very proud, and now I hear he has married into some great family; and so I suppose Falkener, if he too should think of marrying again, will want to do the same sort of thing, and get a peeress in her own right, at the very least."

And so Mr. Marshall walked away, with the reflection that there were two young men the less as regarded any hopes for his daughters. Standing was no doubt desperately in love with Adelaide, and Falkener would want such a wife as Jamaica could not produce.

Mr. Marshall's opinions about women-kind were derived, we may presume, from the experiences of his own home-circle; but it may be doubted whether many men of Mr. Marshall's age and standing in life have very accurate notions

respecting the other sex. Their years might be supposed to be in favour of experience; but whatever amount of that they may have enjoyed, it is certain that a man of sixty, who has married and brought up daughters, has a very different way of estimating women from what he had at six-and-twenty. We are not alluding to the mere truism that sentiment and imagination, which may have been rampant in the young man, will have considerably subsided in advancing years. It is not so much the quantity of the old man's supposed knowledge as the quality to which we now refer. That which he believed true of almost all young women when he was young himself, he has entirely ceased to think even possible in the case of his own particular domestic circle.

At six-and-twenty he thought young women in general were very susceptible of falling in love, and would, for instance, have found it difficult to resist his own powers of fascination, could they only have been in certain particular cases duly and properly brought to bear upon

the young women in question. Moreover, had you thought it advisable to take his opinion as to what sort of a home a young woman of from seventeen to seven-and-twenty might be expected to consider a happy and cheerful one, he would have expounded to you the necessity of not cooping up the poor young things too much, and the duty of affording them plenty of opportunities for meeting members—eligible members, of course—of the opposite sex. He would even have gone so far as to declare that the dangers which might, and not unfrequently did, arise from moping the dear creatures were of a very serious kind. Not only might their health and their spirits suffer, but a day might come when any high-spirited young girl, such as a man would be proud to have for a wife, might find such restraint altogether unbearable, and might take the bit between her teeth and make a bolt of it—small blame to her!

All this, and much more to the same effect, have we heard from the sapient lips of six and twenty. But the paterfamilias of sixty takes

quite another view of human nature, or at least of the female portion thereof. Since those earlier and romantic days he has gone through a long course of all the numerous advantages attached to being born one of the lords of the creation. Besides the crowning privilege of all, the privilege of the Hat, always ensuring him his personal liberty, and his escape from boredom in every shape (except that produced by the sudden presence of a bailiff, against which even the supreme hat is no security), he has enjoyed a series of hunting seasons in the best counties; a perfect congestion of fat beasts; a brilliant succession of races through the length and breadth of England, Scotland, and Ireland; four or five luxurious clubs, which, besides offering him every daily periodical that the great city produces, and affording him, on due payment, every luxury of the season, enable him to stop away from the wife of his bosom till two o'clock in the morning. Plenty of horses for his use, plenty of dogs to shoot with. Cart-loads of cigars consumed in the twelve

months, and a great deal of capital wine.

All this has told upon the man in the long run. And years before he has even reached the age we have indicated, his views as to the requirements of womenkind have undergone a modification. He has, of course, married a woman adorned with many accomplishments, and endowed with many gifts. She has a cultivated mind—she reads, she even thinks. Perhaps she has a fine talent for music, or a great and practical appreciation of the fine arts. Nevertheless he thinks it most extraordinary, and quite unpardonable, that at five and twenty she is not altogether and perfectly satisfied with the exclusive society of her babies from ten in the morning till seven in the evening; and with his brilliant presence when, at nine P.M., he falls asleep after a hard day's hunting, and snores till eleven. He takes her down to a great desolate old castle in Scotland where her nearest neighbour lives at a small distance of twenty miles, and there the moors and the fat beasts are his elysium. Meanwhile she never

hears a note of music, save what she makes herself, and which serves to help him to his ready slumbers. She may read, of course; and, if she be a sensible woman, she does read. But ask any reading man whether, when you have stuffed your head full of thoughts, you do not want some one to talk them out with.

Our friend Mr. Marshall was given up to his business at the docks at Kingston, and his business with his small coffee plantation and his few niggers. In his way also he believed that what was enough for him must necessarily be enough for his womenkind, always forgetting that they never had more than the reflected and refracted glories of his possessions. They had the dry dust of the docks, and the grumblings about the labourers, and the prices of coffee; and they had little else. Of course in time these nuisances took the substantial form of dollars, and provided the women with the necessaries and comforts of life, which is more than can be said of the finer gentleman's hunters, and clubs, and race-horses. But the things in themselves

were not possessed of any greatly exhilarating properties, or any very entrancing interests. Nevertheless, in both cases, widely apart as they may seem, the result was, as it generally is, that from thirty to sixty both classes of married men act upon the one, sole, long-established principle that all their womenkind have nothing to do but "to suckle fools and chronicle small beer." It is true that with some there are more fools and less beer; but the principle is the same. You cultivate, and educate, and refine your intended wives up to two and twenty, and then, once married, you limit her to her babies, her solitary days and silent evenings—her own unaided resources, in fact; and you expect her to be always supremely happy, always ready to dance on the tight-rope for your amusement, and always content to be largely severed from the habits and haunts of her lovely, studious, highly-refined girlhood. This is for your good women. The others do as we have said—take the bit in their mouth,

and are off on their own tack. It will be yet a long time before some of our best Englishmen learn the radical difference between the position of a woman at the head of her house and home, and that of a woman educated for the harem. At present he is generally trying to combine the advantages of both.

Mr. Marshall, having thus disposed of the hand and fortunes of Charles Falkener in his imagination, approached nearer to the groups under the cedars, the centre of which was Miss Snowden. She was standing against the trunk of one of the fine trees, dressed entirely in white, and with all her magnificent hair drawn off her face and floating its full length down her shoulders. It was confined mysteriously by a black band of velvet; and close to her transparent shell-shaped ear, she had inserted a bunch of pomegranate blossoms. They were put in with such art as to look as if they had dropt there accidentally. She had groups of men around her, some half-sitting, half-lying on

the grass at her feet, some on low garden-chairs. Jane and Maria were also there. Adelaide had been singing.

"Miss Snowden more than makes up to us for the absence of our English nightingales," remarked Mr. Marsh, who had not been very long settled in Jamaica.

"I never heard or saw a nightingale," said Adelaide, "so I do not know how far that is a compliment. Is it a pretty bird? I have read about it in poetry; but no one can judge from that."

"Yet poetry is the greater truth," said Standing.

"There's Standing going off into metaphysics. How do you make that out, my dear fellow?" asked Marsh.

"It is the deeper expression of the inner or outer world—it comes nearer to the ideal; and the ideal is the true version of things as they ought to be."

"I am a great deal too realistic to understand that. What do you say, Miss Snowden?"

"It sounds very pretty; but I should not like to live on it as a principle. I fear it would be rather too much of the rose-leaf and dew nourishment to suit me. I thought Mr. Standing had grown very thin since I saw him last. I am afraid he has been living on the ideal."

As she glanced round at him Standing blushed up to the eyes.

"I must say," resumed Marsh, "I like people to acknowledge that they enjoy roast-beef and plum-pudding."

"You come over us with your British notions, Marsh. It is little enough we see of English roast-beef and plum-pudding out here—a poor imitation at the best."

"I know as little of your pudding as I do of your singing-birds," said Adelaide. "I suppose there is very little that is English about me."

"Pardon me, Miss Snowden, it is only English blood that produces beauty like yours."

"And English wit that offers such outspoken flattery, Mr. Marsh. I think I prefer my compliments like my bonbons, wrapt up in coloured

paper, with all the pleasure of unpacking them to see what is inside."

"At the risk of finding too big a mouthful sometimes."

"That does not matter; I can cut it in two and make it last the longer. I am not above owning that I love sugar-plums, and that I like being admired."

"Oh! Addy, how like you that is, to say it out so broad!" exclaimed Jane Marshall.

"There is no use in keeping it secret, my dear. Everybody would know it whether I said it or not; and I should certainly not think it worth my while to deny it."

She looked at Mr. Standing as she finished speaking. His eyes were fixed on her.

"There is Mr. Standing quite shocked at my absence of deceitful decorum. What a pity it is people should always be less well thought of for speaking the truth. Now I never try to give myself out for anything but what I am. And the result is that my old friend Mr. Standing is scandalized."

Standing looked annoyed.

"If you will interpret my thoughts, Miss Snowden, I wish you would do it correctly."

"Perhaps I may, if you will give me the key."

By this time he was close to her, and her other surroundiugs were talking together.

"I think you have the key to that, and a great deal more."

"If I have I do not know how to use it."

"May I tell you?"

"Not here, and not to-night."

She moved away to where Jane and Maria sat. Standing gazed after her with undisguised admiration, and then, turning silently away, wandered off into an unfrequented by-path. He loved her, and he thought she knew it. For a long time the thought of Adelaide had been like a fountain of fresh waters in his soul. There was something in the terrible circumstances of his duel with Johnstone which had necessarily brought her prominently before him. After all, had he not fought that duel on

her account, quite as much as the unhappy man who had been his victim? It was he who had saved her from Johnstone's intoxicated rudeness. Falkener had only hurried her out of the room. It might truly be said he had risked his life for her, and as he had gone over the whole scene again and again in the agonies of his remorse at having shot Johnstone, he could not but remember that it was for her sake, and that she was beautiful beyond all other women he had ever seen. He felt she owed him something in return. He had gone back to England during the period that it had been necessary for him to keep out of sight; and he had seen nothing in his own country to efface the impression which Adelaide had made on him. When he returned to Jamaica, where, as Mr. Marshall had remarked, lawless acts were sooner committed and sooner forgotten than in England, the Cedars had been the first house at which he had ventured to make his appearance.

The Snowdens at least could not turn to him the cold shoulder. And in fact he had been

warmly welcomed by both father and daughter. Mr. Snowden had done a great deal towards making Standing's reappearance in society easier and pleasanter. It was in fact very difficult to condemn harshly a young man of such irreproachable morals and such quiet and gentlemanly manners. It was exceedingly wrong, no doubt, to fight a duel; and it was a dreadful thing to have killed your adversary.

But independent of the possible extenuating circumstances rendering it very difficult for a man to refuse to fight, and making it, with the world's false notions of honour, appear almost a duty to do so, it was impossible for anyone, however slightly acquainted with Standing, to couple him with the character of a quarrelsome bully or a blood-thirsty duellist. People were beginning to look back upon the sad transaction rather as a misfortune than a crime—with, of course, always the exception of the Johnstones, who could not meet him anywhere, and in whose presence his name was never pronounced.

To Adelaide's imagination there was some-

thing rather fascinating in the idea of getting up a flirtation with the man who had killed the one she would not marry. The poetic justice which had so impressed Mr. Marshall had charms for her as well. Of course, as she said to herself. she meant nothing serious. But for the time she was out of temper with Charles Falkener, and bored with her own position, there could be no harm in getting a little amusement out of a moderate flirtation with young Standing; and on the other hand, the fact of her doing so might, as she termed it, bring Charles Falkener to his senses, and plainly show him he would have to come into her views. But Adelaide was not at all inclined to precipitate matters. It was very convenient, as well as agreeable, to have Standing as an admirer. But it would spoil the whole thing if he were actually to propose, and so bring matters to a crisis and get himself dismissed. There was nothing so much to be dreaded as his finding an opportunity of declaring himself too soon. He had to be kept in hand, and yet also at arm's length.

As Adelaide approached the two sisters, with whom Mr. Marsh was in deep conversation, Maria called out to her,

"Here is Mr. Marsh wanting me to acknowledge that as a rule all we women hate each other, and that it is very rare even for sisters not to have some lurking jealousy. Isn't it shocking?"

"Mr. Marsh's opinions arise entirely from the overweening conceit of his sex, my dear. He thinks that women are mainly, if not solely, occupied amongst themselves in the study and contemplation of their relations to the other sex, and that consequently each woman sees or imagines some one man with whom any given woman of her acquaintance is more likely to be successful than herself. Upon these utterly false grounds he supposes every woman is jealous of every other woman."

"You have given a far deeper root to my thought than I was conscious it possessed, Miss Adelaide. But is it not true that women

are generally jealous of others of their own sex?"

"Do you mean indiscriminately of all or any others of their own sex?"

"To a certain extent I do mean that."

"There you are utterly wrong. If you had been talking of a farm-yard full of fowls, I believe your surmise would have been correct. Every hen is jealous of every other hen. But despicable beings as no doubt we are, Mr. Marsh, we are a little better than chickens."

Everybody, including Marsh himself, was laughing.

"But I have always supposed there was a great deal of jealousy amongst women."

"That is, as I have already said, because you have always supposed every woman was thinking about you—I don't mean quite yourself individually, but your sex in general—in short, that we only live to set our caps at you. Whereas, in point of fact, if you and others like you could only be got to believe it, you would learn that we are far more capable of an

individual life than you imagine. Of course there are positions and circumstances in which your presence and assistance is of immense value to us—I may flatter you so far as to say, quite indispensable; but on the other hand, we are queens in our way, capable of very independent action, thinking very little about our masters or our tyrants, and quite able to call our souls our own. For my part, I do not think I was ever jealous of any woman."

"That may be because you are superior to all others you have met, and that you have the habit of carrying all before you."

"I cannot answer another of your unclothed compliments, Mr. Marsh. All I will say is that I think, if ever I was jealous of any woman, she would have an awkward time of it."

"Is it the bowl or the dagger you would offer her?"

"I believe I am quite capable of administering both."

At that moment Adelaide caught sight of Mrs. Oswald and her father coming up the path, and turned to join them, saying to herself with a quiet smile as she did so, "I am not quite sure how far I shall allow my Wren to flirt with that Robin. I might possibly grow jealous there, in spite of all I said to her about it the other day."

As she approached, Mr. Snowden said to her,

"We are talking about you, Addy. Mrs. Oswald says I have been keeping you too much to myself, and that I have done very right in giving this party. She is even kind enough to say she hopes I shall give more."

"I have been telling your father, my dearest," said Mrs. Oswald, in a half tender, half patronising tone, "that I have noticed lately that your spirits have begun to flag. At your age, and before your heart has been, as I hope it never may be, seared by the sorrows and hopes of life, variety and amusement of an innocent nature like this is as essential to the develop-

ment of your character as air and sunshine are to a flower."

"That is taking rather a serious view of a garden party, dear Wren," said Adelaide, slipping her arm within that of her friend.

"Ah, my darling, everything in life is serious, even its pleasures. You and I know that—don't we, Mr. Snowden?"

"Indeed, Mrs. Oswald, you have had an immense amount of experience for so young a woman."

"More than you are aware of, my dear sir."

"I daresay," rejoined Mr. Snowden, not exactly knowing what answer to make. "But you have borne up against your troubles bravely; and, if you will allow me to say it, you look as young as when I first saw you five or six years ago."

"Ah! that was when I was a youthful and hopeful bride. I am conscious myself of a very great change since then."

"I am sure, Wren, you never can have looked better than you do now. I was not aware you

and my father had known each other in former times. Why did you keep that secret from me, papa?"

"Oh! my dear," said Mrs. Oswald quickly, "it is no secret. I once had the pleasure of seeing your father, when he called on my poor husband on some business at Kingston, soon after I came to Jamaica. I happened to come into the room with a message, and I was particularly struck by Mr. Snowden's brow—so like yours, my darling!"

"I am generally reckoned like my mother, I believe," said Adelaide, between whose marble brow and Mr. Snowden's clouded and wrinkled superstructure there was certainly very little resemblance.

"Ah! Mrs. Oswald, you see she don't like to be thought like her poor old father; and no wonder. But she is like her mother, only on a larger scale."

"If you are going to discuss my points, I shall leave you," said Adelaide; and giving a little squeeze to her friend's arm, and a half-sly,

half-affectionate glance to her father, she hurried across the lawn and busied herself in attending to her other guests.

"Ah! Mr. Snowden," resumed the rather sentimental widow, "what a great responsibility it must have seemed to you to have the bringing up of a beautiful and gifted girl like that, deprived of a mother's care!"

Mr. Snowden, whose recollection of his Portuguese wife did not quite come up to what would form the ideal of a woman called to the task of training a girl, could merely reply that no doubt it had been hard work, but that he had tried to do his best, and was, on the whole, satisfied with the results.

"You know, Mrs. Oswald, my wife was not an Englishwoman. There are always disadvantages connected with a man's marrying a foreigner, particularly when he is an Englishman. Now possibly, if my poor wife had lived, Addy would have been less of an English girl than you see her, and that I should have regretted."

"He is easily consoled for the loss of his

wife," thought Mrs. Oswald to herself; "she is evidently well out of the way."

"I cannot tell you, dear Mr. Snowden, how happy I am to find myself living so near to your daughter. The friendship is a source of such delight to me; and then I cannot help hoping I may be of some little use to Adelaide. It is good for her to have something of the society of other women; she feels that herself; she has often told me so. Now I, you know, have lived my life; and therefore, though the difference in years is not so very, very great, darling Addy can have all the advantage of my experience, while to poor me her charming presence is like flowers and sunshine in my little home. I do hope, Mr. Snowden—I do fondly trust you will allow the dear girl to be a great deal with me. It will be such a gratification to me, and it may be of use to her."

"Dear me!—I am quite delighted she should be with you! I am sure she cannot be too much so—I wish it could be always. We should all be gainers, Mrs. Oswald, by as

much as possible of your very agreeable society."

"I am afraid it is not in my power to be of much real use to anyone, except, perhaps, as I have said, to Adelaide, because she trusts me and loves me. Mine is a blighted life, Mr. Snowden."

The rebellious ringlets were hanging very low at this particular moment, and somehow they happened to sweep over Mr. Snowden's hand.

"You should not say that, Mrs. Oswald—you should not indeed. You have a great deal of life still before you. It is natural you should feel a little low as yet; but, bless my soul, a pretty, charming woman like you must not give up so soon. You are too young, my dear, to live always as you do now. It's not right—it's not safe. Deuce take it! I wish I were a younger man myself!"

"Now don't say that, please, Mr. Snowden. It's just your not being quite so young that gives me such confidence in you. I feel so sure

you will understand me, and sympathise with me, for you know what life is."

"Older or younger, I could not do that more than I do now. But perhaps my sympathy would come more gracefully, and be more acceptable if I were thirty, instead of—oh! dear, I am afraid I must own to being fifty."

"I should never have guessed, Mr. Snowden, you were so much as that. You must be joking. Why, you don't look a day older than forty; and that to a man is the prime of life."

"I am afraid the grey hairs tell another tale."

"I don't see the grey hairs. And if I did——"

"Well, and if you did, what then?"

"They could only increase the confidence in you which I have already expressed."

Was she making a fool of him, or was he making a fool of himself? He had an uncomfortable feeling it might be both, but it was very pleasant. There was not a single grey hair in those rebellious ringlets, and they had a way of dancing backwards and forwards, and

touching his hand from time to time, that was very singular, and not altogether disagreeable.

"You must come again, my dear lady—you must indeed. I shall want to consult you about Adelaide. And if ever I could, you know, be of any use to you in any way, of course you would tell me. It is lonely for you down at the Wren's Nest. I don't think it is good for you to be too much there. Come here as much and as often as you can."

And he squeezed her hand as he spoke, while the ringlets gave a parting sweep. There is no saying how long this sort of thing would have gone on had it not been getting late, and many people were coming forward to shake hands and take their departure.

"But how is Mrs. Oswald to get home?" said Mr. Marshall, coming up at that moment. "She walked here, but she cannot go back alone."

"Oh! we will all form a body-guard, and escort her to her own door, or rather to her nest," exclaimed Adelaide.

Immediately there were many volunteers.

Mr. Marshall, his daughters, Mr. Neville, and Messrs. Marsh and Standing. Adelaide led the way with Mrs. Oswald, and, at the general request of the company, sang to them. The still night air quivered with the sound, and the birds woke up in their thick cover of leaves, and shifted their branch with a few interrogatory chirpings. It took them about a quarter of an hour to get from the Cedars to the Wren's Nest. They loitered on the way, laughing and jesting, Adelaide's ringing voice always more clear and bell-like than any other. As she and Mrs. Oswald emerged from the wood on the entrance of her small garden, they both of them perceived a dark figure glide past at some distance, and disappear in the thicket. The rest of the party were lagging a little behind, and saw no one. Adelaide's song ceased suddenly. She had recognized Charles Falkener. So had Mrs. Oswald. Neither woman said a word to betray to the other what she had seen. They embraced at the entrance door. The rest came up, and there was some further delay from the lengthened

farewells of the merry party. Adelaide returned to the Cedars; but she sang no songs on her way home.

CHAPTER VI.

PROWLING AND STEALING.

MRS. OSWALD was not a woman of a shy and retiring nature. Her early life and escape from home may have already informed our readers of the fact that she enjoyed a lark, and was constantly on the look-out for one. Moreover, she had her full share of feminine curiosity, and would not be exceedingly scrupulous as to the ways and means adopted for gratifying it. She meant no harm—she never meant any harm, for she was far from being a bad or a malicious woman. But that one principle laid down of "meaning no harm," the rest was a very open and somewhat

declining path, down which it was easy to slide rapidly; and then, whatever accidents occurred, or whatever simple precept appeared outraged in the proceeding, could always be covered over, as with charity's mantle, by the "meaning no harm."

Youth of both sexes is very apt to satisfy itself with this easy-going virtue; and silly women of all ages do the same. With men grown out of boyishness there is generally more principle about their wrong-doing. They know what they are about, and they do it. The woman shuts her eyes as she takes the plunge, and can then plead that she did not see. There is not a pin to choose between them; for to know it is wrong, and so to do it, or deliberately refuse to know, are both conscious acts. Shutting your eyes and opening them are both motions of the will.

But poor silly little Mrs. Oswald is not on the verge of any heinous crime at the present moment. She is only suffering from wide-awake curiosity at the glimpse she caught of

Charles Falkener's figure receding in the thicket. It was too strong a temptation. She must know what he was doing there. She opened the window leading out of her small sitting-room under the verandah, and listened. There was neither sight nor sound. She knew that to regain the road leading to his own house Charles Falkener must cross an open space of lawn lighted by the moon just outside her verandah. He had trespassed on her grounds to indulge some fancy of his own, and he should pay the penalty by having to pass in front of her on his way back, and render some account of himself. So she stood and waited. No one appeared. Presently she thought she detected a slight rustling in the leaves, and she resolved to step out on the moonlit lawn and challenge him. She stood in the open space and looked about her. At last, after the delay of a minute, a dark figure emerged and approached her.

"Good gracious! Mr. Falkener, is that you? Is anything the matter? You frightened me

terribly. I was afraid you might be robbers."

"I am not a thief, Mrs. Oswald—at any rate, I could not be more than one. I was, in truth, hiding there because I was afraid it might alarm you if you saw me lurking about at this unseemly hour. Then, when you came out on the lawn, I thought it better to come forward at once and tell you it was only I. And I hope you will forgive me for trespassing."

"I forgive you everything. But, if it is not an impertinent question, are you in the habit of haunting the woods at midnight?".

"No, not often; but I was restless and gloomy this evening. I wandered near your house, and then I was attracted by the sound of voices, and came further to hear more. That was Miss Snowden singing."

"Yes, it was Adelaide. There is no mistaking her voice. She is in full song to-night."

Falkener made no reply. Meanwhile, they had both been approaching the house At the open window Falkener offered his hand to take

leave, and wished Mrs. Oswald good night; but there was such a tone of sadness in his voice that she held his hand for a moment, and looking him full in the face said,

"You are not well, Mr. Falkener, or you are depressed. Don't go without telling me what has happened; and if in any way I could serve you——"

"You are very kind; but I believe I have only got a fit of the blue devils on me; and it is not right to be keeping you out—and so late too!"

"Come in, then, and let us have a talk."

"But really, Mrs. Oswald, what will your servants say if they find me paying you a visit so late—or rather so early?"

"They will say nothing, for they will know nothing. We are quite alone at this end of the house, and no one can even hear us."

Falkener wondered a little at the facility with which Mrs. Oswald arranged an interview alone with him, at an hour and in a fashion quite outside all the usually received proprieties;

but he saw no reason why he should refuse. She must know best; and as he was bored and out of sorts he might as well obtain a little solace that way as any other. A shaded lamp stood on the table. She sat on the sofa and pointed to an arm-chair in front of her, which he took. The shade of the lamp prevented the full light from falling on her face; but it came on her white neck and rounded arms. She wore a black lace mantilla over her grey dress. The mantilla had slipt aside, and the neck and arms were bare. She looked very graceful, and very soft and white; and Falkener immediately, without reflecting on it, felt what a pleasant thing it was to have a gentlewoman to talk to.

"Now tell me all. Is your baby ill, or are you only moping under the terrible shadow of your solitude?"

Few men can resist a direct appeal from any woman who has tact enough to make it with the appearance of genuine sympathy.

"My baby is not ill. If I may judge by the

noise he makes, I should say he was in robust health, particularly about the lungs. As for the second part of your question, I have no right to introduce my blue devils into your charming society."

"But if I invite them?"

"I am sure you don't think what you are saying. An admirable woman like you invite the devils! Oh, Mrs. Oswald!"

"I can't help that if you won't come without them. Only I shall expect you to keep them in good order while you are in my society."

"That is more than I can answer for. I am their victim, and not their master."

"Then let me at least try if I can exorcise them."

She leant forward, and the light touched her face and passed in gilded lines among her falling hair.

"I think you might change the character of those who are with me now. But I am not sure the last would not be worse than the first."

"Now you are talking in riddles; and I hate riddles, and never could guess them. Cannot you tell me plainly what is the matter with you? It is true I have no right to ask."

"On the contrary I think you have every right, after the way you have received me; taking me in like a waif and stray as I am, and giving me the consolation of your presence. By-the-by, I told you I was not a thief just now, but this does not look much like being honest, I am afraid."

He thrust his hand into his waistcoat-pocket, and drew out a gold bracelet set with turquoises and pearls.

"Why, that is Adelaide's! Where on earth did you find it?"

And she looked up at him keenly.

"I found it on the grass by your garden-gate leading from the wood; against which gate I had seen Miss Snowden leaning with young Standing about a quarter of an hour ago. She was singing the 'Buona sera' out of the 'Barbiere,' which suits her voice so well."

There was a tone of bitterness as he spoke, which did not escape Mrs. Oswald.

"You are right; it does suit her. What a pretty bracelet it is! I think treasure-trove belongs to the lord of the manor, does it not?"

"In that case it is mine," said Falkener.

"When will you give it back to her?"

"When she comes to fetch it."

"You are put out with my friend, Mr. Falkener. Have you and Adelaide had a quarrel?"

"I have not seen Miss Snowden for nearly a week."

"Now that is an evasive answer. You may have quarreled a week ago, and not met in consequence. I did not know," she added in quite another and lower tone of voice, as if she were making the remark more to herself than to him, "that you were on quarreling terms."

Falkener laughed a short dry laugh. "What do you call quarreling terms? How do you define them?"

"That I cannot do. At least not exactly. Only I think that men and women who are

quite indifferent to each other must find it very difficult to quarrel."

"What degree of intimacy do you think is necessary to produce a state of disunion?"

"Just that degree which, carried a little further, would lead to union."

"You have put me in a fix. Either I must contradict you entirely and say I don't agree with you; or you will consider yourself at liberty to believe that Miss Snowden and I are more than neighbours and ordinary friends."

"You could not prevent my thinking that, if I chose, by anything you might say."

"Then you have thought it?"

"Yes, and no."

"Now it is you who talk in riddles, and I too never can guess them."

"That is only idleness with you; with me it is real incapacity. But I will explain myself. I have always thought it would be too extraordinary if you could live next door, as it were, to Adelaide Snowden, and not be very much struck by her wonderful beauty and charm. At the

same time—now you must not be angry with me for what I am going to say—I doubted if you would marry her."

"And why should you doubt it? Always supposing, which we must do for the sake of argument, that I could ever hope to have it in my power to make her wish to marry me."

"Well, I hardly like to tell you. I am being driven into a corner, and I shall be made to say more than I wish."

"I will drive you into no corner, and I will give you absolution for everything you may say."

"It is easy enough to promise that beforehand, but you may not like it all the same, although much of it is flattering to yourself."

"I think a little flattery from you would make me overlook a good deal."

And he said it in a lower voice, as if he were in deep earnest.

"Oh! but I never flatter, and I never say more than I mean; and seldom so much. But the reason why I do not think you would quite

make up your mind to marry our beautiful friend is because I have a sort of idea you would always do everything more from principle than passion."

"Why should that prevent my marrying Miss Snowden?"

"Because she is a girl to make a man desperately in love with her; but perhaps not to make a very good wife, and a stepmother, and a second wife, to a man like you."

"And why not?"

"Because you are quiet, steady, and domestic; and Adelaide is wild, impassioned, greedy of life, exacting, and ambitious."

"I think, nevertheless, Mrs. Oswald, that Adelaide Snowden would do anything for the man she really loved."

"Of course she would. The character I have just given her belongs to the women who do anything for love."

"Except become steady, stay-at-home wives, you mean?"

"I do not think the fact of being married

alters a woman's character to the extent of giving her qualities adapted to a quiet life, when she was entirely and completely without them before."

"You depreciate the power of a great affection, Mrs. Oswald."

"No I don't. I only depreciate the power of a great passion. Adelaide is quite capable of the latter, and consequently would do anything at the time for the man she loved. But I doubt her being capable of the former."

"Do you think, then, that the only people who ought to marry, or who can expect any security or happiness after having done so, are those who never felt *une belle passion*—for each other I mean, of course?"

"God forbid! But there is the reckless woman, with her *belle passion*, and there is the true, deep-hearted woman, full of matronly instincts, with a *belle passion*. The first is good as a mistress, the second only as a wife."

Even the dimmed light of the lamps sufficed to show her that Charles Falkener blushed. He

said nothing, and there was a moment of awkward silence. Mrs. Oswald laid her hand on his with her cool soft touch, and said,

"I have gone too far. I have given you pain; forgive me, and forget it."

"There is nothing to forgive; to forget is less easy. What would you say if I told you I have sometimes suspected as much myself?" And he laid his other hand on hers, and detained it between his own; she slipped it quietly away, and replied in exactly the same tone of voice,

"I should say that I am not surprised, for I knew it already."

"What did you know?"

"I knew that you loved Adelaide Snowden, and that *you* doubted what *I* doubt—whether she would ever make you happy."

Charles, with his elbows on his knees, shaded his face with his hands. Mrs. Oswald was leaning forward, and he could feel her breath upon them. At length, with a deep sigh, he dropt them, and leant back in his chair.

"I suppose I must tell you all. What a wonderful woman you are! You are wringing from me the very secrets of my soul, which I have never breathed to a human being; and yet I have known you so little."

Mrs. Oswald answered with a silvery laugh.

"There is nothing wonderful in that. Any woman may win the confidence of any man at five minutes' notice, if she only knows how to set to work."

"Are we such sieves?"

"Not at all; but we women were created to be mothers, nurses, confidants, consolers, helpers, in short, in every way. *C'est notre métier*, and it would be a shame if we did not understand it. You need not tell me how it is with you. I will save you the trouble, and will tell you. You are very much in love with Adelaide Snowden. It began before your wife's death. And you are engaged to be married to her."

Charles bounded from his chair and stood before her.

"That's about it."

She got up too.

"Very well. If that's about it, we must make the best of it. I cannot save you, and therefore I must help you."

"You are a good angel. Why did you not come to me before?"

She stepped back, and darted a quick, piercing, almost angry glance at him, and said proudly,

"What good would it have done had I come before?"

"This might never have been; and it might have been something else instead."

"Never say a word to me like that again, Charles Falkener. You will not rise in my esteem by it; and you will only lose a friend without gaining anything more."

She said it. Yet, while she said it, she called him by his name; and Falkener thought it sounded sweetly on her lips. Then, with a gentle, sad smile, she laid her hand for a second on his arm, and continued—

"I will be your friend. Come to me when you like. Come when your solitude up there,"

bowing her head in the direction of his house, "or the cries of your poor little motherless boy are too much for you. I shall come and see your baby sometimes. I shall ask for Mary, and go straight up to the nursery, so you need not think about me. And now good night; it is high time we parted. Only one word more before you go. I know something by guessing, more than I know from being told. It is not easy for you to see Adelaide as much as you wish at her father's house. She is often here with me. You shall be made welcome."

He looked down on her pretty sweet face raised to his, and smiled his thanks. She could not help thinking how handsome he looked as he did so, and she detained him by another question—

"By-the-by, you have never told me how and why it happened that you were lurking about the wood so late to-night?"

"I knew there was a party at the Cedars this evening. Of course I could not go there," he said, glancing down at his black coat. "And I

could not bear that she should be dancing and singing with all that lot of fellows who I know would be there, when she is engaged to me. She might as well do without all that nonsense now, I should think, and keep quiet until it will be proper for me to ask her openly, and speak to her father."

"Now you are going back to what I said at first, Mr. Falkener.. Adelaide is not the girl to do that. You must take her as she is."

"And that fellow Standing, too! I know he's after her. He has been in love with her ever since that night which was the cause of his duel with poor Johnstone."

"What does that signify to you, so long as she is not in love with him?"

"It is not like a clever woman like you, Mrs. Oswald, to ask such a question. You know when a man is in love he can't bear that another man should so much as look at the woman he cares for and who does not yet belong to him."

Again she laughed her silvery laugh, and said,

"Then he should not fall in love with anyone so well worth looking at as Adelaide Snowden. Why, my dear friend, that sort of thing will be going on all through your lives."

"The devil it will! I'll take deuced good care it doesn't, though!"

"There now, don't swear—before me, too! Every man says the same thing. And if every man were able to keep his word, we should have no French vaudevilles, no English genteel comedy, and scarcely any plots for our novels. You had need have the eyes of Argus if you marry a woman of Adelaide's commanding, bewildering beauty."

She made him uncomfortable, at the same time she gave him pleasure. She flattered his vanity by her appreciation of Adelaide's charms, and wounded his self-love by her implied doubt of his being able to make her all he would have his wife to be. And then she was herself so gentle, so understanding, so full of tact, so thoroughly feminine. What a charming wife she would make to any man, he

thought, who was not already in love with some one else! But he had not yet got over his grievance, and taking up the bracelet he had laid on the table, he turned it and twisted it as he said,

"I gave her this. It had belonged to my poor wife; and to think that she should wear it when she was amusing herself with Standing, knowing all the while that I *could* not be with her."

"How unreasonable you are, Mr. Falkener! It ought to satisfy you that she was wearing your bracelet. She thought of you when she put it on—she remembered you whenever she looked at it. What more can you ask? You could not expect Adelaide to shut herself up the whole year you are in mourning, and so make everybody talk and gossip about it. Do be rational; and, instead of making yourself miserable, come to-morrow evening and meet Adelaide, and give her back her bracelet."

Falkener looked touched, and holding out his hand, said,

"Again you are my good angel! I am afraid

I have kept you up a long time, and you will be quite ill to-morrow, or rather to-day, for the dawn is breaking, I see. I shall just run down to inquire how you have slept some time in the morning; and I will accept your invitation for the evening."

She gave him her hand. He bent down and kissed it. Both went to the window together, and she stepped out beneath the verandah with him. In a second she drew back, looking frightened, and whispered,

"Oh! Mr. Falkener, there is quite an irruption of negroes on my lawn. What can it mean? I am afraid it is very awkward. They will have seen you."

"They have seen me already. The only thing is to put a good face on it and ask them what they want. I am so sorry," he said, turning with a chivalrous air to her. "I hope this does not seriously annoy you. I see they are Snowden's men. Here, Sam, what's the matter? What are you all down here for, and at this hour?"

Sam, who was evidently at the head of the little group of four or five men, was Mr. Snowden's carpenter, and pulling a lock of his fuzzy hair he approached bowing.

"If you please, Massa, Miss Snowden has lost a bracelet, a beautiful gold bracelet. There has been a terrible shindy up at the house about it. And we had Missy's orders to be here by daybreak to look for it. We have looked all through the wood, and cannot find it. Long Jack said we were not to come home without looking on the lady's lawn,"—giving another pull at his woolly head as he turned to Mrs. Oswald,—"and under the catalpa-tree, as Jack says he have seen Missy a-sitting there more nor once."

"Oh! that is impossible," said Mrs. Oswald, who failed to remark the deep blush which overspread Falkener's face. "But go home and tell your mistress that the bracelet was found by Mr. Falkener close to my garden-gate, and that he brought it to me to keep for her. Here it is," she added, to give countenance to her assertion.

"Tell Miss Snowden you saw it, and that I hope she will come down to me this evening, and fetch it herself."

Sam stepped forward and looked at the bracelet. Falkener immediately lifted his hat to Mrs Oswald, and said loud enough to be heard by the other men who had all gathered round,

"I am very sorry to have disturbed you, but seeing a light in your sitting-room, I guessed you were not in bed yet, and thought it better to bring you the bracelet at once, as you were sure to have heard Miss Snowden say she had lost it."

He then walked away with the labourers, repeating his injunction to Sam to assure Miss Snowden the bracelet was safe, and slipping a dollar into his hand at the same time. The man looked up with a twinkle in his eye as he pocketed the dollar, and said,

"All right, massa. Sam will say all he should say, and not a word more."

"There's no throwing dust in those fellows'

eyes, whatever you may do," ejaculated Falkener to himself as he walked home to bed.

When Adelaide had returned home that evening, after leaving Mrs. Oswald at the gate of the Wren's Nest, she had missed her bracelet. She thought she remembered putting it on; she thought she remembered noticing it on her arm in the course of the evening. At any rate, it was not in her jewel-box, and it was nowhere to be found.

Dinah the housemaid was called up from her slumbers, and set to hunt all over the house. But all in vain. Adelaide grew more and more excited as one servant after another, whose sleep she had disturbed in her anxiety that it should immediately be looked for, came back to say it could not be found. With her mind already pre-occupied about her father's losses, she was disposed to see a thief in everyone of them. But Long Jack was her favourite suspicion; and oh! if she could only prove he was the guilty man!

When the sleepy Dinah returned for the third time to say the bracelet could not be found, and Adelaide herself was too weary to order any further investigation, she had desired the girl to go to her father, who slept in one of the dependencies, and tell him to take three or four of the men by early dawn down to the wood, as far as the gate of the Wren's Nest.

Dinah's father was Sam the carpenter, whom we have already seen accomplishing his mission. On her way to her father she had met Long Jack, and asked him to let her in again when she should come back. She repeated to him her mistress's orders about the search her father was to make. And it was then that Long Jack had added that remarkable injunction to look under the catalpa tree, which had brought the blood with a rush to Charles Falkener's cheek, and which Sam had repeated, quite unconscious of its double meaning.

Sam thought he had made quite discovery enough when he had seen Mr. Falkener coolly

issuing from the window of Mrs. Oswald's sitting-room, accompanied by that lady, between two and three o'clock in the morning. One intrigue at a time was as much as Sam's imagination could compass, and this appeared to him a colossal one. There is no saying how far and wide he might have blabbed; but the dollar timely administered would keep him silent at least for twenty-four hours; and that was something among such a set of gossip-mongers as the negro servants of a household invariably are.

Still Falkener re-entered his house with rather a perturbed mind; far more so than was Mrs. Oswald's. She had weathered such squalls before, and hoped and intended to weather many more. She was a very dexterous woman, and not to be easily put out of countenance by such a simple occurrence as a man being seen leaving her house at two in the morning, when not only she had "meant no harm," but when in honest truth there had been no harm. She should have nothing to do but

to tell the truth. And if they did not believe, why *tant pis* for them.

Mrs. Oswald was not, after all, a woman who had ever carried an intrigue to a great length or a bad end. She had made an affectionate and faithful wife to her late husband; she had ever avoided giving any extreme encouragement to the male friends who came to the house, and who had been not unconscious of her soft and feminine charm. But though she had kept them in hand until they could be quietly dismissed, and had not made any disastrous scenes by ringing the bell for the footman, and ordering an admiring morning visitor out of the house, according to the supposed orthodox style of the true British matron, and which, if put literally in practice as often as is supposed to be the case, would probably make that same tactless British matron a considerable nuisance to her husband, by either entailing a succession of duels, or, in these days when duels are not fought, a series of trials for assault and battery. A woman ought to know

how to keep straight, and protect her fair name without *des scènes sanglantes;* and probably no husband is grateful to a wife who cannot ward off those accidents, and deal with them satisfactorily, without calling in the marital protection. Happy, indeed, is the young and inexperienced wife who finds it possible to tell her husband to avoid asking this or that man to the house, or throwing her much into the society of some particular associate of his own. But it very rarely answers. This mutual confidence is what it ought to be, but, generally speaking, it is but little adapted to the British husband's view of things. Unless with his own eyes he has detected that the friend of his leisure is getting too particular in his attentions to his wife (in which case, woe to the wife far more than to the friend!), he will put down any feminine little appeal on her part either to absurd vanity, or to a silly attempt to enhance her own value in his eyes. He will vote it a bore that any impediment should be thrown in the way of his free intercourse with his friend;

perhaps he will not believe her; and if he does he will make things unpleasant to her.

Mrs. Oswald was too shrewd a woman to run any foolish risks of this kind. She learnt, as every woman should do, and the sooner the better, to protect herself and to keep her own counsel. There is no such thing as delegated virtue. If it is to bear the wear and tear of life, it must be self-sustained and self-protecting—of course we mean so far as human aid is concerned. Human sympathy can do very little towards making even women firm and brave, unless they are so without it. And probably one of the first lessons, and certainly one of the most startling that the young wife learns, is the fact that, welded in holy matrimony as they may be, she and her husband remain individual souls, individually responsible to God and themselves, and shut up in that individuality to a far greater extent than, in the first gushing confidences of young love's dream, they had thought possible. It is a dangerous moment when this knowledge first comes to an

impressionable and clinging nature; and, alas! it is one against which there have probably been no warnings, and for which there has been no preparation.

There would be fewer sad slips down life's gliding path, fewer broken hearts and ruined fates, if more practical common-sense were allowed to enter into our best feelings, and discipline our finest emotions. Taken at its best, life always must be a hard task, and not a Summer's holiday. But when the young girl leaves her mother's care for another home, she generally imagines there will be more support leaning on her husband than she ever found in her maiden state. If only she could be told that from henceforth she will have to lead a double, or rather a twofold life, requiring a twofold courage! The man has the courage of his principles for himself alone; the woman must have it for him and herself both. She has to command and exercise as much as ever she did before, and even more, the tact and delicacy required for her own guidance in all the

questions which relate entirely to herself as a woman. And *pari passu* with this, she has to understand and compass and combine the tact and courage and broader views that belong to the man's part in life. Hers is a double action —for herself and for him. His is for himself alone, with the permission, nay the requirement, that she shall fit in as she can, always up to the mark, and neither clogging the wheels nor staying the course of his chariot. Let her, then, from the first beware of the erroneous supposition that what pertains to him will suffice for her. She *must* lead her own life, as well as his. Does she not know that his takes him out into the wide world of politics and pleasure, of business and money-making, of hunting and deer-stalking, while hers is to sit at home and expect?

It is for this reason that women need more education than men—we mean more distinct and intentional education. Men are fashioned and formed by circumstances; women are hand-

work. And their own hands have more to do with it than any others. Above all, let them beware of the error of counting upon married life for finishing it off well, unless it has been completed before that ordeal. Men expect to find their wives ready-made; and where that is not the case, matrimony more often mars than makes.

Mrs. Oswald had never reasoned in this way. She was incapable of it, morally and intellectually. But, nevertheless, she had managed to steer pretty clear down the river of life, and yet had amused herself considerably with the flowers that grew on its banks. She was a very good sort of average woman, with all an average woman's natural love for behind-the-scenes acting, and more than the average amount of tact. As she was incapable of a very strong affection, it had not needed that to make her faithful to Oswald. But now that was at an end, and solitude was already becoming irksome to her. As she said herself, she liked a man about the

house. The frequent banging of doors had a healthy, cheerful sound; and the unavoidable and quite unaccountable crumpling of the chair-covers which invariably follows the male occupancy, as distinct from the female, did not jar upon her nerves in her pretty, well-appointed drawing-room. The perfume of a cigar was like native air to her, even when accompanied by that of freshly-blacked shooting-boots. And as Jacob detected in Esau the smell as of a field that the Lord hath blessed, so shooting-jackets and leather gaiters had a particular charm for her senses. She was essentially a man's woman. She was not a mother, never had been, and probably never would be; but she was plucky, cheery, tender, and lively; and, in short, altogether was a very good fellow.

She retired to rest at three o'clock that morning, in better spirits than usual, and with a very quiet conscience. There might be some *fil à tordre* in consequence of that night's adventure. But the prospect was rather exhilarating than

embarrassing. And meanwhile it had no power to break the repose with which she laid her golden-brown hair in unravelled tangle on her pillow, and slept the sleep of infancy.

CHAPTER VII.

URIEL'S SPEAR.

ADELAIDE woke very late the following morning, and was anxious to hear about her bracelet. But Nursie was there to relieve her mind on that score by assuring her it had been found. Of course Adelaide wanted to know all about it. She was not particularly astonished when told that it was Mr. Falkener who had picked it up, for she too had, as our readers will remember, seen him hanging about near Wren's Nest, and had returned home silent and somewhat conscience-stricken in consequence. She felt sure what she had done would rouse all Charles's capabilities of jealousy; and though

that was just what she intended, yet it was a dangerous game to play, and the issue was uncertain.

Charles had a quiet impressive way with him, which before now had occasionally awed Adelaide. He had, moreover, the great advantage over her of being the less madly and passionately in love of the two; and though she was not convinced of this, and did not argue on it, nevertheless it had its effect upon her. As Nursie developed her account of the finding of the bracelet, Adelaide hit upon one or two points in the story which puzzled her. It was all very clear with regard to Falkener's having given the bracelet to Mrs. Oswald, but when it came to the inquiry of how Sam, not having found the bracelet, had arrived at the knowledge of Charles's having picked it up, there were difficulties connected with the details of the account which required clearing. She resolved upon seeing Sam himself later in the day and questioning him.

Meanwhile, in consequence of a message to

that effect, she went to join her father in his study. She found him in a greatly disturbed state of mind. Ten dollars had suddenly vanished out of that extraordinary drawer, which, nevertheless, was always kept locked. And this was the second time, since we last found him complaining of the fact to Adelaide, that the thing had occurred. Adelaide suggested that some one must have obtained a second key that fitted the lock. But when he told her that it was a Bramah lock and key which he had brought over from England with him, she knew that could not be the solution of the mystery. Adelaide's mind reverted to her old impression that it was Long Jack who perpetrated the robbery when her father was "not quite himself," by the very simple process of taking possession of his keys and unlocking the drawer in a straightforward way. There was every probability that Mr. Snowden had gone to bed the night of his party in a slightly exhilarated condition. He had behaved very well so long as Adelaide's eye was upon him; but she knew that

some three or four "old cronies" and "jolly dogs" had stayed behind to drink a parting cup with her father, after she had retired to her room and all the rest of the company was gone. Who could tell in what state Long Jack, who always sat up, or, more properly, who always lay down on a rug outside the door till his master went to bed, might have found him when his services were required. It was impossible to obtain any reliable information from Mr. Snowden himself. In the first place, Adelaide did not dare cross-question him; and in the second place, he would not remember. So after a few remarks with him on the subject, which led to no definite result, she left him, resolved, if possible, to work out the problem for herself.

Nursie, however, was always to be trusted upon every occasion, and especially by Adelaide. So she sent for her to her own room, and the two women began talking it over. Adelaide communicated to Nanny her impression that it must be Long Jack, and that to effect it he

took advantage of his master's periodical fits of intoxication; but nothing she could say would make Nanny share her views. Long Jack had his faults—he was a low, coarse, vulgar nigger, and he did not love Missy; but, on the other hand, he had a dog's devotion to his master. He looked up to him, he worshipped him, and he would stand like a watch-dog over his possessions, great or small. If Long Jack had a suspicion as to who was the thief, he would be the first to denounce him.

"But no one else, Nanny, ever goes into my father's room except you and me. To be sure Dinah goes in when she has to clean the room and put it to rights."

"That's true, Missy; there's Dinah, and I'm not so sure of Dinah."

"You don't mean that! I always thought her rather a good girl than otherwise, and have a liking for her. She has such nice manners, and is not so lazy as the others. She has white blood in her too, and is a pretty-looking girl."

"That is all very well, my darling. But white blood is no more free from its natural whims and fancies than the blackest blood that ever made a nigger's heart beat," and she gave Adelaide a meaning look and a kiss as she spoke. "I don't understand it in Dinah's case," continued nurse, "I must say; but the fact is the silly girl is in love with Long Jack, and is doing all she can to win him."

"Oh, Nursie, is it possible! That nice pretty girl to like such a hideous monster as he is!"

"That may be, my darling. But even ugly men do win women's hearts sometimes. And though I grant you Long Jack has all the ugliest points of a negro about him, yet they do say he has as much claim to white blood as pretty Dinah herself. His grandmother was a slave at the time when all were slaves. And his supposed grandfather was the former proprietor of all this land, long before your father bought it. Long Jack, like Dinah, was born on the estate."

"And you know then, Nursie, that she thinks of marrying him?"

"*She* thinks of it, the silly minx, but I don't believe he does. That is why she is dressed out so smart of late. She is always in new gowns and new ribbons. More, as I told her the other day, than could come honestly out of her wages."

"What did she say to that?"

"Why, Missy darling, she was very saucy and very uppish; and I told her if she ever dared speak to me again in that style I should tell you, and she would be dismissed, for all that she did belong to the place, as it were."

"I suppose that frightened her."

"It did indeed. For of course then she would lose Long Jack; not that I think anyhow she has any chance of catching him. Long Jack is fond of money, and Miss Dinah has nothing but her wages, and the little her father may lay by."

"What is your opinion of her father, Nursie?"

"Oh, he's a deep one, is Master Sam. He's a very clever carpenter, and he knows a thing or two besides that. I shouldn't be surprised if he knew how to pick a lock as well as any man. But then, you see, the lock has not been picked."

"Would he like his daughter to marry Jack?"

"He would like her to do anything she set her heart upon. She turns him round her finger. They are worthy of each other, Missy darling. For if he is deep, so is she. Only I never say anything. I have never caught them in anything. And as you like Miss Dinah, and master has a great opinion of Sam as a carpenter, there is no occasion for me to interfere."

"Are you sure, Nursie dear, that Sam never goes into my father's room?"

"He has not been there, at least to my knowledge, since he was had in to mend the blinds which got torn down by that dreadful storm we had a month ago."

"Just the time that my father first began to miss his money," said Adelaide to herself. But she did not communicate her suspicion to Nanny.

When the nurse was gone she sat some time revolving it all in her own mind. And as she did so her convictions strengthened. Dinah and Jack both wanted to marry. Meanwhile they were making up a purse together with their pilferings. And perhaps, nay probably, old Sam was assisting them. He was a clever carpenter and a clever locksmith; he might have found out some way of giving his intended son-in-law access to the inside of a drawer; and if so, nobody had such opportunities of profiting by it as Long Jack, even supposing her surmise about his getting occasional possession of her father's keys were an error.

Meanwhile, as she wanted to hear all about the lost bracelet, she would send for Sam and see what impression he made on her. Sam was a sinister-looking individual, and it was certainly not from him that Dinah inherited her good

looks. Adelaide began by frankly asking him a few questions as to how he had heard about the bracelet. But she found it very difficult indeed to get at the rights of the story. She extracted from him, with enormous difficulty, that it was Mr. Falkener who had found the bracelet, and that it was Mrs. Oswald who now had it. But upon all the details as to when he had seen them; how it had happened that he had seen them together, or whether, in fact, they were together; and how that was possible between two and three in the morning, not one straightforward reply could be got edgeways out of Master Sam. He had no sooner admitted one thing than he declared on his honour that the contrary was the truth; and when this declared truth was brought to bear upon other admissions, it suddenly gave way and vanished into smoke. The only thing about which he was quite certain, and from which he never for a second deviated, was Long Jack's having told him very particularly to look under the catalpa-tree, because Missy was often there.

No doubt the astute Sam perceived that on the first mention of this the blood had rushed to Adelaide's face, and that for a moment she remained silent and pensive. Consequently, whenever her queries grew very close and difficult to evade, he darted off again into an allusion to her frequent visits to the catalpa-tree, and invariably found it had the same desirable effect of attenuating the sharpness of her cross-questioning.

Thus by constant harping on Long Jack's words, and assuring her of how diligently he had searched in the neighbourhood of the catalpa-tree, he succeeded very completely in neutralising the intended results of the interview.

It left, however, one very strong effect on Adelaide's mind. She hated Long Jack worse than ever—and she feared him. With this feeling her conviction, if it may be called a conviction, when it was in fact only the result of her own angry feelings, that he was robbing her father, deepened in proportion to her increas-

ing abhorrence of the man. When she had sufficiently mastered her feelings, and smothered her discomfort resulting from the vagueness respecting the mode of Falkener's discovery of the bracelet, she determined upon putting the whole case before her father, and endeavouring once more to fix his suspicions on Long Jack. She related to him all she had learnt from Nursie; and she laid great stress on the fact of Dinah's attachment for Long Jack, and the probability that they were making a purse together with a view to ultimately marrying and setting up for themselves.

Mr. Snowden was a shrewd man by nature, and his education as an attorney had cultivated that quality. He took in all Adelaide had to say, and at once perceived the bias of her mind, and that she was for ever veering round to her old animosity against Long Jack. He was quite open to the possibility of Dinah's having something to do with it. Her duties brought her into his room at least twice a day, and that when he was himself absent. Besides, if she had

any motive for it, there was nothing to prevent her going in oftener if she chose, and watching her opportunity for doing so when the rest of the family were out, or during the two hours' daily *siesta*.

All that was very possible; and it was equally possible that Sam might have helped his daughter in her nefarious practices. Sam was a clever fellow, with a strong natural tendency to being a rogue. Mr. Snowden had always kept him on the estate because he was exceedingly useful; but he never thought the fellow trustworthy. Only, as no particular trust was reposed in him, it did not so much signify.

As regarded Long Jack it was another thing—Jack had lived with him as long as Sam; that is ever since he had settled in Jamaica. But then it had been under very different conditions. Jack was his constant attendant, and always the same; always equally devoted, equally submissive, and equally full of tact, discretion, and help in the many occasions when Mr. Snowden's

terrible harm, even if Jack's mind was a very venial offence. Even his mind drunk on the care and compassion of his own valet. He might swear at him then as much as he pleased. He might abuse him, even strike him. It never made any difference to Long Jack: his patience was inexhaustible, and his respect undeviating. Jack rob or cheat his master! Why, he might have done it a dozen times over, under circumstances in which it would have been almost impossible for Mr. Snowden to resent it; and it had been especially at those very moments that his devotion and disinterestedness had most shown themselves. Nothing that Adelaide could say had any effect before the many years of experience which were recorded in Mr. Snowden's grateful memory. Finding she produced no result, she finally proposed that they should send for Long Jack, that Mr. Snowden should tell him how he had been missing small sums of money lately, and that, at last, no longer ago than yesterday evening, he found as much as ten dollars had been extracted from the

drawer. Jack listened in profound silence, and then with his eyes glancing from Mr. Snowden to Adelaide, and back again to his master, he said,

"Why Massa not tell Jack when Massa first begin to miss his money?"

"I did not tell you at first, Jack," replied Mr. Snowden, "because I hoped I might be mistaken. Then when I became certain that the money continued to go in spite of the precautions which I took, I thought I would wait and watch a little longer before I told anybody, except my daughter. It is always disagreeable to have to show suspicion."

"Massa had better have told Long Jack. He could have watched and waited too."

"You see, Jack," said Adelaide, "if we are to suspect one servant in the house, we may as well suspect all."

"No, Missy, I don't see that. Some servants are above suspicion. Missy does not suspect Nursie."

"Missy does not suspect any one in particu-

lar, Jack. She is only anxious like myself to find out who the person is, or at least to hit upon some probability short of actual proof, which it is hardly likely we shall obtain; I do not want to make a noise about it. If the thief took my watch or Missy's jewels we might have the suspected person searched. But a thief who confines him or herself to taking coin, and in such small quantities, is not so easily found out."

Adelaide turned suddenly round to the man and said,

"I am told, Jack, that Dinah is a great friend of yours. What is your opinion of the girl?"

"If Dinah were a great friend of mine, Missy, I should have an opinion that she was worthy to be Jack's friend. But as that is not the case, I have no particular opinion about her."

"Then you are not engaged to marry Dinah?"

"I am not engaged that I know of to marry anybody. And if I were, it would certainly

not be to a trumpery piece of goods like Miss Dinah. She may be good enough for what she is here, but she would not do for Jack's wife. What made such a thing come into Missy's head?"

"I had heard that Dinah was making up to you, Jack; and I thought she might be trying to get up a small purse against the time."

"Hush, Addy," said Mr. Snowden, looking greatly vexed. "We have no right to say such things without more grounds for suspicion than any I can find here."

No words could depict the negro's look of rage and indignation at Adelaide's imprudent speech.

"Jack understands; Jack knows what Missy Adelaide means. Dinah is a thief, and Jack is a thief, and the two thieves are cheating for each other; and they will marry on Massa's money, stolen from Massa's drawer. Missy pretends she thinks Jack has the money, because she hates Jack. Perhaps she thinks he has her lost bracelet too, and that Jack has

stolen that. But Missy may mark Jack's words —she is more likely to find it under the catalpa tree than in Jack's pocket."

He looked her full in the face as he spoke, his eyes glaring and his voice hissing out the words through his clenched teeth.

Adelaide turned livid, and remained motionless. Mr. Snowden, who could attach no particular meaning to the words, was at a loss to understand Jack's sudden allusion, or the effect it seemed to have upon his daughter. He could only imagine that her nerves were shaken by his violent manner, which also he did not fully comprehend. So, turning to the furious negro, who was still hissing like a snake, he said,

"Hush, hush, Jack! I cannot allow you to speak to Miss Snowden in that way: You are entirely mistaken in supposing that she suspects you of any dishonesty, or I either. I have known your faithfulness in my service too many years for such an idea to cross my mind for a moment. On the contrary, I sent for you because, if anybody can help me to detect who it

is that is robbing me, it is likely to be yourself, on account of the interest you take in all that concerns me."

In one moment the negro was on his knees, clasping his master's hand, and wetting it with his tears.

"Massa knows poor Jack. Massa knows Jack loves him—would die for him! Massa sure Jack never touch one cent out of Massa's purse."

"I am quite sure of it, my good fellow. We are all sure of it. There, that's enough. Now, Jack, think if you can hit on any plan for finding out who does it."

Jack rose from his knees, and wiped his eyes with the back of his coat-sleeve. For the rest of the interview his eyes never once wandered to Adelaide's face. He looked and acted as if she were not present.

"Has Massa examined the drawer well?"

"No; I cannot say I have done more than look into it to see if my money is all there; and this is the fifth time I have missed a portion of

it, though never so much before as ten dollars."

"It is the left-hand side drawer as Massa sits at his writing-table?"

"Yes, that's the one."

Jack stooped down on all-fours, and began carefully examining the floor at that end of the table. He passed his forefinger in a straight line backwards and forwards in front of the left leg of the table several times. Then he did the same with regard to the right leg. He rose from his prostrate attitude and said,

"The table has been pulled forward oftener from the left side than from the right. The mark in the floor of where the castor has run comes out further, and is a little stronger. Massa stand there, and Jack will look at the back of the drawer."

The table was heavy, but not too much so for one person, even a woman, to move alone. Jack pulled the table far enough from the wall to enable him to insert himself at ease between it and the back of the drawer; he then knelt down, and began a very careful examination.

He felt the wood over all its surface. He pressed his finger at every corner. It was all solid. He then slipped his finger underneath the drawer, and presently he felt a tiny brass round nob, which on being pressed went in, and thereupon the back panel of the table, which ran in front of the back end of the drawer, fell forward, and was prevented falling to the ground by two small hinges on the lower edges, so neatly concealed as to be quite invisible until the spring had been played upon. Jack then perceived that at the back of the drawer, which was revealed to sight by the falling panel, a small piece of wood had been scooped out. He tried to put in his hand, but Jack's was a large clumsy paw, and there was no inserting it. He looked at his master's hands and shook his head. And then without looking at Adelaide, he said,

"If Massa will ask Missy to put her little hand here, Missy can take anything out of the drawer she likes."

Mr. Snowden looked at his daughter, Jack

ducked under the table and came up on the other side; Adelaide took his place between the table and the wall, inserted her slender hand and wrist through the hole, and brought out her father's purse.

"Now, Massa see, no hand that is not pretty and very small, and very soft, like Missy's, can get into that hole. Jack can't do it. The man who made this hole could not do it. But there is one person in the house could do it besides Missy. Massa wait there, not stir. Jack bring the proofs; Massa will understand all."

He held up his hand as if to enjoin secrecy and patience, and left the room. Mr. Snowden was very much interested in the proceeding, and that drew away his attention from Adelaide's silent and somewhat gloomy manner.

"Wonderful fellow, that Jack! Fancy it's never having struck you and me to examine the back of the table! But I wonder what the fellow is gone to fetch? We must let him have his own way, and see what comes of it."

Adelaide endeavoured to recover herself, and to answer cheerfully, and she succeeded. But in her secret heart she was feeling how fatally and how entirely she was in the power of Long Jack.

Presently he returned, and in his hand he had a small piece of wood, which from lying about had got knocked and worn at the edges, but which fitted exactly into the hole at the back of the drawer. Jack called his master's attention to the wood; it was the same wood and the same grain. Evidently it had belonged to the drawer, and evidently it had been taken out to admit the entrance of a small hand.

"Now, Jack, you said there was one hand in this house as small as Miss Snowden's; whom do you mean?"

"Dinah wears all Missy's old gloves. Dinah got a pretty wee hand. Not white like Missy's, because she works hard; but small and soft. Nursie can't wear Missy's gloves. She gives them all to Dinah. And Jack has seen Dinah

in new gloves of Missy's. Perhaps Missy gave them; that's no business of Jack's."

"But now where did you find the piece of wood?"

"In Master Sam's workshop. Jack saw it there two months ago, just after Sam had mended the blinds in this room after the storm. Jack thought nothing of it then, but when he saw the hole he remember piece of wood, and look among rubbish in Master Sam's shop. And Jack knows now; Sam did it for his daughter's little hand to pull out Massa's purse!"

Having made this speech Jack pushed the table back in its place, after once more closing the panel, made a bow, and walked out of the room.

He had done his part. He had discovered the secret by his sagacity; and in doing so he had vindicated his own character. The rest was no business of his. What steps his master might choose to take, what comments he might

give, had nothing to do with him. He had done his duty, and now withdrew his sable dignity of demeanour from the scene.

Adelaide questioned her father as to whether it was not his intention to convict Sam; but she found him averse to that course—it would be difficult to bring it home to him. Moreover, even if, as was really evident, though not demonstrable, he had made the hole, he had certainly not stolen the money. It was nearly as evident, and quite as undemonstrable, that Dinah was the thief—under her father's directions, of course. No witnesses could be found. It would be a most diffcult case of mere presumptive evidence; and whether or not a conviction was obtained, it would cause a great deal of ill-blood.

Sam had lived on the property all his life. Dinah had been born on it. The best way was to give them both notice to quit, and let them take a cottage, or rather a hut, at a distance. Sam was too clever a fellow not to be always able to get a livelihood. At a distance from

his own house, it was not improbable that even Mr. Snowden might employ him again in cases where his skill would be of use, and where his dishonesty could not hurt his employer. As for Miss Dinah, she would probably also easily find a situation. But at any rate her father was quite able to provide for himself and his daughter also. Mr. Snowden would not make any direct accusation; but he stated that he had been losing money out of his drawer for some time past. He said he was unable to prove who had committed the robbery, but that certain unpleasant circumstances led to his deciding on Dinah's leaving the house, and Sam withdrawing from his abode in the yard, and having a little tenement at a considerable distance from the Cedars.

Sam was very sulky, and Miss Dinah shed torrents of tears; but evidently both thought it wiser and safer to demand no investigation into any accusation that might be made against them. And the very small amount of remonstrance with which they accepted their dis-

missal was considered by all as one of the strongest evidences of their guilt.

Adelaide left her father's room in a thoroughly wretched state of mind. She was intensely worried by Jack's inuendoes, and more than worried at the extraordinary suspicion awakened by Sam's incoherent account of the finding of the bracelet. That there had been some collusion between Charles and Mrs. Oswald, was quite evident. That in itself was a disagreeable mystery. What had been the meaning of Charles Falkener's prowling about the wood close to Mrs. Oswald's lawn at that hour? Could it be possible he was waiting for her? Of course he knew all about the party. Even if Adelaide had not given him some sort of information on the subject, they were too near neighbours, and gossip and tittle-tattle was too habitual among the negroes for everybody connected with Mr. Falkener's household not to be thoroughly well aware Mr. Snowden had got a garden party. Charles then had known

it. He had expected Mrs. Oswald home late that night. He had waited for her ; he had re-entered the house with her, by appointment—and they had spent, good God! two, perhaps three hours of the night together! It could not be accident. No combination of circumstances could have made such a proceeding fortuitous. What did it mean, and how long had this state of things existed?

The thin end of the wedge of jealousy once inserted in Adelaide's heart, the ravages were widely spread and formidable. Was it possible that he had so soon, so readily followed in the wake of her own half childish resolution just to amuse herself with Standing; and had he indeed seriously taken up with Georgiana? But then it is a woman's privilege to hang out her colours every day until the fort is taken. She had a prescriptive right to flirt with Standing while waiting for Charles, if she chose. A woman's charm is like a flower intended to blossom and attract so long as the sun shines. Besides, even though she had thought the

thing, and perhaps hinted at it, she really had not carried it into execution. Nothing of any moment had passed between her and Oliver Standing, and Charles had taken his revenge before he had received the smallest injury. It was not only ungenerous, it was unmanly. And then it was so cruel! In all that happened who had been the one to suffer, he or she? Had she not braved all, risked all, even her reputation, for his sake? It was a little thing for a man to ask his sweetheart to meet him by moonlight. The world would take that quite as a matter of course, would smile and applaud. But it was a very different case with regard to the woman who complied with such an invitation. With him it was quite right, quite natural. But another law existed for her. And that law she had braved for him; braved it not once nor twice, but scores of times.

And now she loathed her own condescension. She ought never to have given him that satisfaction. The labour, the risk, the toil of meeting her should have been all his, unalleviated by

one act of hers. Oh! that she had left him to suffer, that she had allowed the musings of love to waste his life and suck his strength, without ever letting him know that his feelings were returned! Would that she could torture him with unutterable and unsatisfied longings! Would that she could light such a fire in his heart as should consume him like a snail, while she stood aloof and watched it."

Then came the agonizing doubt as to whether this was, or ever had been in her power. Did he love her with that wild intensity which would make life a very hell without her? What after all was she in his existence, that her silent withdrawal should be like night and winter falling suddenly on a midsummer's noon? She had read of such things; she knew that they existed, but could she feel any confidence that Charles cared for her in that way, or to that degree? And yet it was thus she cared for him. Oh yes! spite of the nonsense about amusing herself with others, spite of the craving for more sound and movement than her life afforded, she

loved him with all the agony of a passion; and jealousy was like a two-edged sword that pierced her heart, and turned, and groped, and dug into her very entrails. The rage searched her veins like poison, flushed her cheeks like fever; and then with succeeding pallor wrung her heart as when a woman swoons.

And yet if he would only tell her it was not true! If she could see him, and he could swear once more, as he had so often done before, that all his love was hers, how readily would she believe him! Her excited imagination was full of images of that possible interview which was to dissipate all her fears. She felt his warm lips on hers. She fell back as against his arm clasping her, and murmured, "Oh, my darling, my darling, tell me that you still love me!"

But while her soul was yearning with all such sweet relenting towards him, it was shaken to the very roots of her being with the fierce unrelenting fury against *that other one* who was the cause of all this.

No! if Georgiana had won so much as one thought from him, if he had once glanced into her eyes as he had gazed into her own, then there was no mercy possible towards her, no forgiveness in this world or in the next. Charles might be pardoned; because, yes, bitter avowal! she could not live without him. But her friend, her false, vile friend, nothing could ever excuse. With the lust of revenge in her heart, she pictured to herself the tortures she thirsted to inflict. She would have her fair name blasted, till it should be the very synonym of dishonour. She would have her beauty wasted by some cruel disease; or perish piece by piece in the flames—which her own hands would gladly light.

She pictured to herself Georgiana in a far-off future of extreme poverty and dire distress, and that she would see her thus, and spurn her. She fancied her hunted through life by calumny, and persecuted by vindictive enemies, who should all be her willing emissaries.

Torn by the violence of her feelings, she flung

herself on the ground, and buried her face in the cushions of her couch. She tossed her bare arms over her head and entangled them in her long tresses, which she ruthlessly tore and twisted. She wept till she could weep no more, and till the very fountains of life seemed dried up within her. Oh! green-eyed monster! there is no scourge like thy scourge; and the worm that dieth not must partake of thy nature if it really embody all we have most to dread!

Meanwhile, by an unusual coincidence, nature was in sympathy with Adelaide. One of those sudden and terrific storms which sweep across the beauties of Jamaica like a visible agent of God's wrath, was tearing over the forests, dashing against the hill-sides, and roaring from the deep, dark, cavernous clouds, to the loud echoes of the valleys beneath. The cedars shook their huge boughs like the folds of a black mantle that some giant swaths across his sturdy form. The light feathery foliage of the tamarinds shivered with incessant motion, and even the stately palm-trees bowed slightly before the

awful voice of the tempest. When all shall be over the little humming-birds will be found dead, like broken flowers, beneath the acacia-trees where they had built their nests, and drowned and nearly colourless butterflies will strew the ground like petals. But after that there will be a great calm.

It was simply impossible that Adelaide should keep her engagement at the Wren's Nest for that evening. It seemed impossible for any human being to pass from beneath the shelter of a roof on that day. And at least it was so to her. Her own wild weeping, and the freshened air, from which the storm had carried off its overload of electricity, left her exhausted but calmer. She began to argue with herself on the unreasonableness of her too rapid conclusions. It was true she had not seen Charles for above a week. But so brief a time could never uproot so deep a love as that he had borne her. Nor was it possible that Georgiana, whom she had seen no further back than yesterday, could have been carrying on so treacherous a game

without her having discovered some symptoms of it in her frequent intercourse with her. It was a mystery, certainly, and a very painful one, but no doubt it could be explained; and if she could only get through the remainder of that day and sleep through the long hours of the night, to-morrow *must* bring a solution, and probably entire reassurance. She convinced herself partly if not entirely. She cajoled her own heart, and attempted that impossible task, to console herself. In a measure she succeeded in keeping her fears at bay, though from time to time a spontaneous doubt would dash across her brain and heart, like the fewer, fainter flashings of lightning when the storm is dying out.

CHAPTER VIII.

HUSH MONEY.

THERE were two individuals whom no amount of storm, hardly flood itself, would have kept under a sheltering roof the afternoon and evening of the day which saw Sam the carpenter dismissed from Mr. Snowden's service. When Dinah came down to where her father lodged in the yard and dependencies of the Cedars, she found him busily packing his tools and small worldly posessions, and at the same time singing merrily.

Dinah's face was still blotted with tears, and her eyes swollen out of her head, and she felt irritated at the ill-timed gaiety. She sat down

on her father's settle and watched him gathering his small possessions together.

"Why do you sing, daddy, when Dinah's heart is broken? It's all your doing that I am turned out of a home that's as much mine almost as it's Missy's. I did as you told me, and now I am to go."

"Hold your tongue!—Sam isn't going to give in like that. Devil take Massa and Missy too! But I'm not going to be out of place, nor you either. I'll have a better home than this, and pretty Dinah shall live like a lady, and have smart ribbons and fal-lals, and win her man yet."

"There, now, don't go on like that, daddy. Where's the home to be found? Do you think I'm going to make up my mind to the hut Massa talked about? Likely enough I'm going to live in that sort of way when I've been as good as a lady ever since I was born!"

"No, no, Dinah, darling—no huts for you, and no huts for me."

Sam at this moment took up a screw-driver,

and making a motion of screwing it very hard into a piece of board before him, nodded his head in a sapient fashion at his daughter.

"That's what Sam's going to do, and he knows how; and so just you dry your pretty eyes, and don't let the proud Missy there think you're down-hearted."

"Well, and that's what I am, sure enough," replied Miss Dinah, as she got off the settle and shook her skirts, to get rid of the shavings and sawdust which clung to them. "I don't understand it; but I'll just wait and see what you *do* mean, and then I shall know if I like it. But I'm not going to abide by it if I don't."

Dinah shook her head at her father with anything but a dutiful expression, and wandered back into the house to see if she could meet with Long Jack. She rather wanted to speak her mind to him a bit before she went where daily intercourse would be impossible, even had Long Jack been so disposed, which, unhappily for Dinah, was not the case. She and her father were to leave the Cedars the next day.

Sam had very soon completed his brief preparations for flitting, and having piled his property in a corner looked out anxiously at the sky. The storm was gathering rapidly; it might be five minutes before it would break. It could not be more than ten. He gathered himself up like a man determined to brave everything, went noiselessly out into the open, locked the door carefully behind him, and took away the key. As soon as he was out of sight of the windows of Mr. Snowden's house, he took to his heels, and sped down the steep bank into the wood, in the valley towards Wren's Nest.

He had not got above half way before the tempest commenced. The wind took him and spun him round like a top. Had he been on the high ground it would have lifted him off his feet. He flung himself on the ground flat on his face, to escape the whirl of the tornado. Nevertheless he had the narrow wood to cross, and meanwhile the trees were crackling around him as if under the influence of fire. He looked

up at the tossing branches, and listened to the loud ceaseless rustle of the leaves, the volume of unbroken sound that wailed, and hissed, and shook, and quivered above and around him. He heard the fall of a tree not far from where he lay, and turned his head affrighted to see if he was beyond the reach of its descending sweep.

So all-pervading was the general rushing noise of the tossing boughs that, beyond the first crash and grinding of the trunk, the giant's actual fall hardly sufficed perceptibly to increase the universal tumult. He lay still a little while till he thought he perceived a lull, then rising again to his feet he rushed headlong into the wood.

The path was all downward; he followed it rather by instinct than by sight. Just before he emerged on the other side of the wood, a bough caught him as it was rising again from the swaying of the wind. It gave him a great gash across the brow, and the blood poured down his face and into his eyes. In another second the

gates of heaven were opened, and not rain, as we understand it, but a sheet of water, poured relentlessly down, was driven right in his face by the wind; and in one second of time drenched his thin clothing as if he had walked into the water.

In this state he darted headforemost under the verandah of Wren's Nest, close to Mrs. Oswald's sitting-room. He stood against the wall, where no one in the room could see him, and paused a moment to recover breath. His clothes, which were entirely of white linen, were by this time covered by what, diluted with rain water, appeared a large quantity of blood. His face and hands were in the same ghastly condition; and it was in this plight that, having sufficiently recovered himself, he flattened his nose against the window which opened into the verandah, and from which he had that very morning seen Mrs. Oswald come forth with Charles Falkener. Mrs. Oswald was sitting with her profile to the window, listening with horror to the storm. She was very pale,

and her hands were clasped. One door was open into the corridor beyond, and another into an adjoining room. In both corridor and room the whole of Mrs. Oswald's household had assembled—some under pretence of fearing she would be alarmed at the storm, but all because they were genuinely frightened themselves. One or two of the younger maidens had indulged in an attack of hysterics, which, as is always the case, had elicited a great deal of needless sympathy from the elders. Mrs. Oswald had long given up all idea of reasoning on the fact that screams and tears would have no effect in appeasing the storm or lessening the danger. They thought her very profane for holding such opinions, and very hard-hearted for expressing them. And so she had left them to their own way of meeting the calamity; a great deal of which consisted in muttering charmed words, and otherwise resorting to fragments of superstitious lore, which all their supposed conversion and civilization had failed to eradicate from their still heathenish natures.

Mrs. Oswald was far from being herself inaccessible to terror, and was at all times greatly influenced by atmospheric changes. She was at the present moment feeling very faint and giddy, and was simply waiting with what calmness she could command till this awful manifestation of the occult powers of nature should subside.

The sudden intervention of an opaque body between her and the very little light which the murky sky afforded, caused her to turn her head towards the window. She was too brave a woman to give an articulate scream; but her countenance assumed the expression of a smothered exclamation of terror. She at once recognized the man, and at once connected his unexpected appearance with the occurrences of that morning. He might only be come with a message from Adelaide, though it hardly seemed likely she would send one in such weather. He might, on the other hand, want to make some communication to her, which, after what had happened, it were better should be revealed

Miriam had been indulging in a larger and louder luxury of hysterics than the others. She was the youngest and the pet of the household, and at the present moment had, quite exhausted, given up screaming and subsided into wild sobs. With a great deal of coaxing, and some pretence at scolding, Miss Miriam was at length induced to rise, and was elaborately helped out of the room by the other women.

"Lor', isn't Missis wonderful? Them out-and-out white women are strange creatures; and, to my mind, not altogether natural. Missis cares no more for tornado winds than for the flap of a butterfly's wing!"

"Missis would care fast enough if it were a real tornado, and the roof lifted from off the house, leaving her a-sitting all alone in her chair, though she don't mind this sort of thing."

"And isn't this sort of thing bad enough?" shrieked Miss Miriam, as a huge branch of a tree fell crashing to the ground, and the young lady again went off into wailing and tears. Mrs.

Oswald paused at the door till all were gone, and till the sound of their voices was as far off as the kitchen. Then she came back, shutting the doors behind her, and went straight to the window where she had seen Sam's black and bloody face. She opened it gently and motioned to him to approach. As he did so, dripping wet, covered with smears of blood, and his woolly hair running down like an overcharged sponge, he caught sight of his own hideous image in a long glass just in front of him. Immediately a broad grin illuminated his face.

"Beg pardon, Missis, Sam run for his life, big bough nearly knock him down. Sam not meant to frighten dear lady. Beg pardon."

"What do you want, Sam? What in the name of fate brings you here, and in this awful storm too?"

"Sam come to ask pretty lady to protect him; know she'll be Sam's friend. Sam got the sack from Massa up there."

"What has Mr. Snowden dismissed you for, Sam?" asked Mrs. Oswald, who began to fore-

see what was expected of her, and who from the first aspect of that black mask looking in at her window pane had felt the man knew he had got a hold over her.

"Oh, Missis, what Sam know about it? Massa drink, Massa very drunk. Massa lose money, Missy lose bracelet. Me suppose Massa want victim for his fetish, choose poor Sam and pretty Dinah, and send both out, neck and crop, into the woods this storm."

All this was accompanied by a very telling pantomime, first of Mr. Snowden's potations, and secondly of himself and daughter being flung promiscuously into wide space.

"But what can I do for you, Sam? I am not likely to be able to influence Mr. Snowden with respect to keeping or parting with one of his own servants. He must have believed he had some very good reason for sending you away, for I have heard you were always on that estate, and I know you are considered a very clever carpenter. Besides, you know, that's all nonsense, Sam, about the bracelet. The bracelet

was dropt by Miss Snowden, and has been found. There could be no possibility of your master's thinking that was stolen by you."

"Pretty Missy's very clever, pretty Missy's always very quiet, very cool. Massa very drunk, say perhaps Sam steal money, perhaps Dinah steal bracelet. Brandy in Massa's head, no sense, talk wild, and very, very mad."

Sam put on a very grave and awed expression of face as he made this running commentary on the old adage of "when the wine is in the wit is out."

Mrs. Oswald was not for a moment taken in by the rascal; but she was too well used to their snake-like ways to venture upon snubbing him and sending him about his business. It was safer to know what it really was he wanted, even at the expense of some shock to her feelings by staying to hear it.

"Still, Sam, even if all this be true, I do not see what I can do for you."

Sam drew a little nearer, with a pause between each step, as though he were preparing

to come forward at the right note in the figure of a quadrille. When he was not above two feet from Mrs. Oswald, and it was all she could do, knowing so well the exorbitant vanity of his sensitive and touchy race, not to shrink back a pace or two from his vicinity, he threw a peculiarly unctuous leer over his swarthy features, and bent forward his low savage face till it was close to her, shaking it slowly from side to side as he spoke, like some methodist parson on some "sweetly" spiritual theme,

"Pretty lady *can* help poor Sam. Pretty lady got such a kind heart. Sam know. Oh! Sam know all about it, though Sam never say a word to hurt Missis; bite out his tongue" (putting forth the ugly member between his teeth) "before tell the folks how Missis so kind to poor widower. Nice gentleman, widower; tall and so handsome. Wife dead, so sad! Missis pity widower gentleman; take him in, two o'clock in the morning; comfort him. Nobody know. Gentleman go home again. Sam see all."

Mrs. Oswald could hardly bear it. Her teeth were clenched, her eyes darted flame and anger, and she was very pale. She opened her lips as if to speak, but the monster was in an instant closer still, and put out his hand as if to touch her. She started back, and he did not touch her, but he still held his hand extended just above her wrist.

"Missis not speak—servants hear,"—glancing at the door—"that not good for missis. Sam always hold his tongue. But missis send for handsome young gentleman, and tell him; take Sam into his employ; good wages. Dinah live with father, then Dinah not peach, Sam not peach, missis all safe; one day, may be, marry handsome widower, and make all straight."

"But I don't know that Mr. Falkener wants a carpenter, Sam," responded Mrs. Oswald, in a voice choking between terror and a sense of extreme degradation at thus being in the villain's power.

"What's that got to do with it?" resumed Sam, with a coarse laugh. "Sam's not going

to starve while pretty lady and handsome man amuse themselves. Secret belong to Sam; missis do as she please." And he made a low bow, and then fixed his eyes on her with a broad insolent stare.

We have already said that Mrs. Oswald was no coward. She had by nature and by practice a great deal of self-possession. But Sam had taken her at a great disadvantage. She had been up half the night, and the violent storm had lowered her nervous tone. She staggered beneath the stare of the hateful negro, and clutched at the back of the chair near which she was standing. For a moment she doubted her own strength, and felt uncertain whether she was going to faint or to burst into tears. Before, however, the critical moment had struck which would deprive her of all remaining power of self-control, there was a loud tap at the window, and turning her head she saw, with a mixture of relief and embarassment, Charles Falkener looking in with an anxious face. He did not wait till she had reached the window to

let him in, but entered at once and said,

"I have in vain endeavoured to make of any your servants hear, Mrs. Oswald. On account of the storm all the doors and windows are closed, and I imagine they are hiding either in the roof or the cellars, for I could find no one, so I thought it better to announce myself in the way you see I have done."

As he spoke his eye and his mind were taking in the scene before him. He perceived Mrs. Oswald was very white and much agitated. He had caught the half brutal expression of the negro's face as he approached the window; and without giving Mrs. Oswald time to make him any reply he turned at once to the negro, and eyeing him from head to foot as if he were measuring his length preparatory to flinging him out of the window, said in a sharp stern voice.

"What the devil are you doing here?"

At once the whole aspect of the nigger changed. The bully was gone, and the coward

alone remained. He turned his lowered head with an imploring look to Mrs. Oswald, and clasping his hands said,

"The lady will speak for poor Sam, Massa; she'll tell you of Sam's distress, and will plead for poor Sam and pretty Dinah."

Thereupon be began to whine, and to rub his eyes with the back of his hand, as though the deep scene of his wrongs was about to make him weep. Mrs. Oswald replied in a half articulate voice, at the same time giving Falkener a glance of unutterable distress and deep meaning, by briefly stating that Mr. Snowden had dismissed Sam and Dinah suddenly from his service, and that he had called on her to beg she would request Mr. Falkener to engage him at once. Charles saw all the anguish and all the entreaty in her face, which her simple words alone would have failed to convey. He understood the whole case at a glance, and in a tone of authority he turned to the negro and said,

"Go down to my house and wait there till I come. Tell the servants you met me and have

my orders to wait. And now walk out of this room, and remember that if ever I find you within a hundred yards of this house again, upon any pretence whatever, I'll break every bone in your body,"

Thereupon Sam burst forth into a complete howl.

"Massa did not understand. Sam meant no harm; would serve Massa all his life, and never tell tales, and serve missis too. Sam love Massa, and only want a home, and bread for himself and Dinah."

Falkener caught again Mrs. Oswald's imploring face, and replied,

"Get along with you instantly, you hound! I don't say I won't employ you, particularly if Mrs. Oswald thinks you deserve it. But I am not going to talk to you about it here. Go down to my house and wait; and take very good care you don't forget what I have said to you."

Mr. Falkener flung open the window, and beckoned him to pass out. Sam waited for no

more bidding. He cringed, and ducked, and dragged at his woolly locks, and finally sidled out of the room like a reptile, and so vanished.

Mrs. Oswald had sunk into a chair, hidden her face in her hands, and her whole frame was convulsed with sobs. Falkener stood before her in great distress; it was better not to speak till the first emotion had passed, and so he kept silent. He knew he was the cause in a great measure of the annoyance she had endured; he deeply felt his inability in any way to repair the mischief. She soon recovered her composure, and taking her hands from her face looked up at him like a child, with a smile shining through her tears.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Falkener, for making such a fool of myself. But the storm has unnerved me. All my silly maids have been in hysterics," she said laughingly, "and then that dreadful negro came into the room covered with blood, and has been so insolent."

Charles took the unresisting hand which lay on the arm of the chair, and which felt very cold

and feeble in his warm firm grasp, and then she told him all that had happened. By the time they had talked it out it was quite decided that Mr. Falkener should take Sam into his own service.

"I make no doubt," he said, "the fellow is a rogue, and that Snowden is perfectly justified in parting with him. But I cannot allow you to run any risk of annoyance in consequence of my imprudence. The rascal saw me leaving your house in the small hours of the morning, and only by keeping him near me can I have any security against his making mischief. I can find work for him. I did not exactly know half an hour ago that I wanted a carpenter; but now I find it indispensable to my welfare to engage one, and Sam presents himself in the nick of time. Set your mind quite at rest about it, my dear lady. I know these darkies every inch of them. If Sam finds it is his interest to be silent, he will be like the grave. And then even if he did talk (which he won't do) who cares one rush what a nigger says?"

"Still, Mr. Falkener, I could not help caring if the wretch were to speak about it. You see my position is such a delicate one. And then, too, there is dear Adelaide to be considered."

"I see it all. But you must promise me not to torment yourself. Will you not trust to me that what you did out of pure kindness and pity for my wretched state of mind last night shall bring you no harm? As for Adelaide, you wrong her if you do not believe that she would be the first to understand all that has occurred, and to see it in its true light. She is far too generous to mistake the matter for a moment."

Mrs. Oswald looked at him, but made no verbal reply to this. She knew with a woman's instinct about women that she did not wrong Adelaide; and that her rival (for such she was rapidly growing to consider her) would be the last to interpret favourably, or to forgive the little incidents of that early morning.

Mrs. Oswald was under the agreeable spell of the feeling that she had gone through a certain

amount of danger and suffering on Falkener's account; and she did not overrate the tie that was sure to make, in a generous nature like Charles's. On his part he had a slight dawn of that yearning feeling which the strong man has for the weaker woman, who is pretty and confiding, and who has got into something of a small scrape (it must not be a very large one) for his sake. It was a claim on his manly protection; just that claim which Mrs. Oswald had such a marvellous knack of establishing, nobody could quite say how or why, but which every man felt who was at all thrown into her society. They were both of them in a very perilous position; and certainly so far as Falkener was concerned, the best thing he could do for his own peace of mind was to believe that Adelaide would not care.

Not care indeed! How surely Mrs. Oswald knew to the contrary! But how cleverly she concealed her entire conviction from Charles Falkener. Nevertheless, it was necessary to be armed at all points, and some consideration

was due to the question of how Mr. Snowden might take the fact of his nearest neighbour and intimate friend opening wide his doors to his own discarded servants—and that without even any preliminary reference to himself. Mrs. Oswald felt the delicacy of this point more than Falkener. He would not have cared himself, unless on the grounds of fearing his friend might be cheated by a rogue he had found it necessary to dismiss. He had not come to the age when people grow punctilious, and he was not so by nature. He supposed Mr. Snowden would think he was a fool for having engaged Sam without making inquiries as to why he was dismissed from his last place. But he did not for a moment imagine it would be more than this, or that his neighbour would ever make a personal grievance of it. So, having endeavoured to tranquilize Mrs. Oswald on that point, as well as on all others, he went back to his own house to have his interview with Sam.

Very different was his way of handling that in-

terview from what Mrs. Oswald's would have been. He never so much as glanced at the gist of the whole question, beyond warning Sam that if he meant to remain in his service he would have to act with discretion, and to keep a civil tongue in his head. In all probability a woman would have fluttered round the dangerous point like a moth round a candle, and have burnt her wings in so doing. Charles Falkener spoke with cool, calm, masterful authority. But then an unsullied reputation means a different thing with a man from what it does with a woman. It is a far better wearing material in the former case, and moreover it will wash. With the woman it is like the bloom on the butterfly's wing; and she is not always to blame when rough hands have fingered it.

The bargain was soon struck between Falkener and Sam. He was not to reside in the house, but was to have a tenement at an easy distance. With Dinah he would have nothing to do. Her dismissal might in some way, as yet unknown to him, be connected with Adelaide

and her interests or wishes. But as he did not confine Sam to working solely for himself, it was quite in the clever carpenter and locksmith's power to earn enough to support his daughter at home, at least until she should procure another situation.

Sam returned to the Cedars in a highly triumphant state of mind. He was to have a better house, higher wages, and, as he chose to believe, a better master. And then it must be added he thought it would be pleasant to keep his daughter at home with him for a time. He was very proud of Miss Dinah, whose beauty he was always extolling, and it is wonderful what an eye for personal charms these half savages possess. Their taste may not be always very refined, but they have a taste; and it is quite as defined and far more warmly expressed than amongst the same rank of persons, if such a term can be used in connection with them as compared with whites, in European countries.

Meanwhile Miss Dinah had been having a parting interview with Long Jack. Now,

though that gentleman had spoken with marked contempt of Miss Dinah during the interview with his master and mistress that morning, it must not be therefrom concluded that he so treated the young lady to her face. Moreover, Long Jack, who was fully as vain as all the rest of his race, was rather flattered at finding that the pretty housemaid's sentiments towards himself were a subject of notoriety. And when to that was added the supposition that she had actually been committing theft in his favour, and with a tender view to their common benefit hereafter, he felt touched and grateful.

Long Jack would never have robbed his master himself. But this arose from a peculiar turn of mind in reference to Mr. Snowden in particular, rather than to any deeply abstract views on the moral bearings of honesty and dishonesty. Mr. Snowden belonged to Jack far more distinctly than Jack belonged to Mr. Snowden; and Jack loved and defended his property accordingly. But it did not at all follow that, because Long Jack would not have

robbed his master of one piccayune, he might not cheat a little elsewhere. Still less did it follow that on high moral considerations he condemned all kinds and degrees of picking and stealing in others. And when it came to the supposition that fair fingers had been guilty for his sake, oh then! though he had himself been the first to discover it and denounce it, Long Jack was far too gallant to entertain any sentiment but one of gratitude when it came to a tête-à-tête with the fair culprit.

Having introduced herself into Mr. Jack's pantry, Dinah opened the attack by flouting him in every possible way. He told her she had been making her lovely eyes red with crying, and she swore that was no business of his, and that at any rate the tears were not shed on his account. By degrees, however, there was less snapping and snarling in the tenor of their conversation, and a strain of more tender sentiment began to disclose itself. It ended by a promise of mutual regard, and at last of eternal friendship. Dinah would always want to know what

was going on up at the Cedars, and wherever she might be (for Sam had not yet returned to tell of his good luck) Long Jack was to call and tell her. In the midst of the increasing confidence of the interview Mr. Snowden's bell rang, and Jack had to hurry away. As he slipped past Miss Dinah standing by the pantry door, he managed to put his arm suddenly round her waist, and give her a loud, unsentimental-sounding kiss. He received a smart slap in the face for his pains. But no matter. The preliminaries had been entered upon, the *entente cordiale* was in progress; and meanwhile a series of strictly private confidences and communications was sure to be established —out of which how many might grow, and upon which how much might depend! "A man's foes shall be they of his own household." The words of everlasting truth have a wide extension, and are as applicable to the minor as to the major events of human life and destiny.

Dinah found her father in high spirits when from the pantry she went down to his workshop.

He was very mysterious as to how it had all come about, and elucidated the riddle by a great many winks and nods and shrugging of shoulders, all of which confirmed Dinah in her belief that more was meant than met the eye, and riveted in her the decision to discover with time and patience what it was all about. He described the tenement alloted to him by Mr. Falkener as a sort of palace in miniature, in which Dinah was to be quite the lady; and he already alluded modestly to himself as Mr. Falkener's confidential dependent, one who was likely to obtain great influence over him, and who would have much to do with the future welfare of his large property. At first Dinah thought her father must have been partaking too largely of the hospitality offered by Mr. Falkener's servants; but on longer inspection of his appearance she decided this was not the case.

"I suppose, daddy, Mr. Falkener won't take me into his house, as I have been here? I think I should rather like that."

"No, no, my Dinah. He doesn't want any more pretty housemaids, specially now his wife is dead. But Sam's a-thinking he can get his Dinah a place down at the Wren's Nest, with the sweet lady there. Wait a bit, my piccaninny, and daddy will manage it."

"Does Mrs. Oswald want a maid?"

"No, not that I know of; but if I ask her, or if I tell Massa Falkener to tell her he wants a place for you, she'll make room for you, I'll be bound!"

Dinah thought her father was raving, but beyond a repetition of the same assurance about a vast and unlimited future in which she was to put her faith, Dinah could get nothing out of him.

She had, however, wit enough to take her cue from him, and trust enough in his sagacity to believe she could not do better than imitate his braggadocio; and consequently she paid a second visit to the pantry, where Long Jack was cherishing his silver forks and spoons, and re-acted for his benefit all the exultation and

triumph which she had just witnessed in her father. Only that in this case it was the same with a difference; because she wanted thereby to enhance her own particular merit in Long Jack's estimation, and to convey to him that the home she was likely to have, now that her father had transferred his services to Mr. Falkener, was one in which he, Long Jack, might be proud to visit her.

She repeated word for word what had been said about her father's making Mr. Falkener oblige Mrs. Oswald to take her into her establishment. And Jack listened with distended ears. He was far too astute not to connect the whole thing with so much as he had already heard about the finding of the bracelet. But as he perceived Dinah had no idea of all that really lay beneath these slight indications, he was very careful not to rouse her suspicions in any way, and only encouraged her to rattle on, promising to himself a return to the charge, no matter how many calls it might necessitate

upon Dinah in her new house, until he should have unearthed the fox.

He began to suspect, though he could not clearly see his way, that here was another rod in pickle for Missy, towards whom his hatred had intensified fifty per cent. since the events of the morning, and the hints she had thrown out about Dinah, which he was now doing so much to justify, and, above all, since her openly declared suspicions of his honesty. He flattered Miss Dinah to the top of her bent, and affected to believe it was all her own and her father's intrinsic merit which had led to the latter's obtaining such an excellent situation the very instant he wanted one. They parted the best of friends; and this time the stolen kiss was not repaid by a slap in the face.

The next morning, at an early hour, Miss Dinah appeared in her very gayest attire at Adelaide's door, to have the honour, as she expressed herself, of wishing her mistress goodbye. Adelaide had hitherto rather liked the

girl, and had no spite against her for having purloined a few of her father's dollars. The theft had, after all, not been proved to a certainty; and if Dinah were the thief she probably did not know how wrong it was. She had a few dollars in her hand ready to give the girl as a parting token of good-will, and meanwhile began by expressing a hope she would soon find other employment.

"Oh, there's no fear about that," said Dinah, with a saucy toss of her head. "Father is gone to be carpenter at Mr. Falkener's, which is a capital situation, and a much better house than what he had here. I shall stop with him a little, just to amuse myself; and then I shall tell Mr. Falkener to get me a place with Mrs. Oswald."

"You silly child! It does not follow because Mrs. Oswald is Mr. Falkener's tenant that therefore he chooses her servants for her!"

"Ah, well, Missy, that's as may be. That's what father says, and no doubt he has his reasons for saying it. He's a good father to

me, and I always goes by what he says, whether or no."

"Of course you do. But if there is any question of Mrs. Oswald's taking you into her house, she will ask me or my father about you, Dinah, and I will say all I can in your favour. It is very unfortunate my father's having lost all this money. But I shall always say as I feel, Dinah, that nothing has been *proved* against anyone."

"Missy may say what she pleases, and as she pleases. Father will tell Mr. Falkener what he wishes about me, and there's no sort of doubt Mr. Falkener will attend to it. So I wishes Missy a good morning, and hope she may soon get a sweetheart as may suit her."

At the close of this audaciously impudent speech, Miss Dinah dropped a deep curtsey, and backed herself out of the room.

Adelaide sat perfectly stunned. Was everybody gone mad? or was she living through a long nightmare? She felt her head giddy with the inextricable entanglement of her thoughts;

and unable to bear the dreadful uncertainty any longer, uncertainty about everything and everybody in the past, present, and future, she resolved to brave the growing heat of the day, and be carried in her litter (for it was already too hot for riding) down to the Wren's Nest, and have it out with Georgiana Oswald.

CHAPTER IX.

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.

"IS it possible that is you, my dear Adelaide!" exclaimed Mrs. Oswald, who had rushed to the door on her friend's approach. "I had not hoped for the joy of seeing you till the cool of the evening. Why, what makes you look so wan and ill, dearest?"

"I did not know I looked ill. I suppose I am only a little tired; and then the heat is so very great. I am come for my bracelet."

"Here it is, dearest. You heard, I suppose, all about it. Oh, Addy, quite a romantic adventure! You saw poor Mr. Falkener lurking about the night before last, no doubt, you sly puss, though you said nothing about it. Oh!

Addy, I did not know you could be so reserved —and with me, too! Well, poor man, not being able to come to your party on account of his mourning and all that sort of thing, I suppose he did not know what to do with himself, and so he came out for a stroll. He heard your voice singing, and that nearly drove him wild. Then he saw you leaning over the gate, and finally he sees your bracelet glittering in the grass, just where you dropped it, and he of course picked it up."

"Yes; that's all very clear, but it does not explain, Georgiana, how it happened that he brought it *here*."

"Oh, my dear child, that was my doing. I, too, saw him when you did, but of course I did not say anything. I was not going to destroy your little game with poor Oliver Standing, and I did not want to run the risk of your being annoyed, so I said nothing, but just quietly waited till my gentleman *must* cross the lawn in front of my window where I was standing; and then I hailed him, and he came up and

told me about his having found the bracelet."

"Did he stay long?" asked Adelaide, with an under-glance through the curtains of her very long eyelashes, peculiar to her when she either was not speaking the whole truth herself, or suspected another of similar reticence.

"Indeed he did! Long enough to risk quite compromising your poor little Wren, if it were known. But what could I do with him, poor fellow? I had to listen to all his ravings about you, and all his despair at not being able to ask your father's permission at once, &c. &c. I assure you, my dear Addy, it is not so very amusing to sit and hear a man go on by the hour about his love for another woman. And to think you should have kept this so close from me!"

"Did he really say all that, Georgiana?"

"Didn't he! I only wish you had heard him. At last I got so sleepy, dear, I was obliged to turn him out, though not before I had told him he might always see you here, when you could not meet at your father's in consequence of the

necessity of keeping it quiet while he is in such deep mourning. And then, just as he was leaving me, old Sam arrives with half a dozen of your father's darkies at his back, to look for your bracelet, and I really began to think my reputation would be entirely sacrificed to my friendship for you."

"Did Sam see Mr. Falkener?"

"Of course he did. And what is more, Sam has been here to-day to insist on my begging Mr. Falkener to take him into his service; and I had to promise, too, that I would do it. Think of that, my dear! And then I sent for Mr. Falkener, and put the case before him; and he has consented to take him. But I find he won't have anything to say to Dinah; and I think he is quite right there. I never fancied that girl."

"And is that really all, dear Georgie?"

"All, my darling! I should think so, and more than enough too. I have been quite ill with the worry and the fright, for I can tell you I did not like Sam's looks or his manner either, when he said to me—the rascal!—that,

as Mr. Falkener was here last night, I had better get him to give him a situation as his carpenter."

"Poor Georgie! It really was all very awkward!"

"It was indeed. But I felt it was so important for you, my dear, that nothing should reach your father's ears at present. So, if Sam is made to hold his tongue about Mr. Falkener's visits here, you can come, you see, whenever you find it more convenient. Poor fellow, he was so grateful to me for telling him I would manage it—Mr. Falkener, I mean."

"It is very, very kind of you, dear Georgie," said Adelaide, very much moved, and taking her hand. "I had been made a little anxious by the mystery which seemed to involve the whole affair of the finding of the bracelet, and then of Sam's seeing Charles here. Now I see it all clearly; and I am so much obliged to you, dearest."

Mrs. Oswald's bosom heaved with a short deep sigh of intense relief. She had perfectly

succeeded. With the solitary exception—not, to be sure, an unimportant one—of stating that she had sent for Falkener, when in truth he had come of his own free will, every word she had spoken was true. And yet it was the truth under so different an aspect, and with such altered colouring, that it was certain to convey exactly the impression and persuasion which were diametrically opposite to the truth. Only a woman could have accomplished this with such perfect accuracy. Every fact was acknowledged, nay, broadly stated. There was not an equivocation or a falsehood (always excepting the statement respecting her having sent for Falkener); and yet the whole was so admirably adjusted that it left on Adelaide's mind the exact reverse of her former fears, and at the same time the reverse of the real truth. And yet we say that "facts are stubborn things." They are indeed so in their own essence; but in our handling they are the most malleable of articles. Chameleon-like, they take the colour of the minds in connection with

them; they adapt themselves to the individual, be he who or what he may; and they need constant sifting, winnowing, and kneading, before ever the small kernel of truth can be got at. And even then!

Adelaide sat silent for some time, while her friend, with an unusual glitter in her eyes and a hectic spot on either cheek, rattled on, as if to drown the past in a flood of small talk. Adelaide was ruminating in the truest sense of the term. She was going over all that had happened, and extracting the bitterness or the sweetness. She was not quite sure she liked Charles' having made a *confidante* of Mrs. Oswald. *She* had not done so; and certainly it was her place to speak first, rather than his, on such a delicate matter. To be sure it might be the vehemence of his feelings, which in this instance had outrun his discretion. And if so, she supposed she must forgive him. After all, she thought it did not much matter; Georgiana must soon have found it out; and, as she had so generously offered her countenance to the

proceeding, it might be very useful. At any rate, she should be more secure from Long Jack's detestable prying, for after what had occurred any more meetings under the catalpa tree might lead to premature and fatal discovery.

Altogether Adelaide began to hope all would be for the best. She had in Georgiana a friend who might be very useful to her. A calmer feeling was settling down in her still weary soul after the awful conflict of last night, and again that of this morning when renewed by the irritating interview with Dinah. She was too little experienced in life, in its chances, its probabilities, and its psychology to know that the *probability* was in favour of there being some real though still occult cause for her violent suspicions of a few hours ago. We are not so entirely the sport of circumstances for it to happen often that a very strong suspicion, any more than a strong antipathy, should be wholly without cause. Maniacs may be subject to utterly causeless panics, and men with

passions like mania; but the sane man's heart is often better informed than his senses or his reason; *le cœur a des raisons que la raison ne comprend pas.* And when he finds himself violently affected by some incident which appears on superficial explanation to turn out a mere trifle, or which never admits of being entirely explained away, the probability is that he was more or less right in his earlier impression. We have a blind instinct in us which will not be put down; and thus it happens that those who in long years have gathered experience are less easily talked out of a painful apprehension than are the young and hopeful.

"After all I was right," is the sad summing up of many an illusion which took long in fading. One day the dear illusion drooped a little, and immediately we knew that the worm was at the root of our beloved gourd. But friends talked it over, and we watched it, and watered it, and still sat complacent beneath its shadow. Then rose the midday heat, and behold suddenly the gourd gave way; the long leaves fell

flabby and dank at our side. The golden flowers were crumpled into nothing, the flaccid stem had snapped. Yes! our apprehension had been correct—only just a little premature—and after all we were right. Happy those who have disproved a lurking suspicion, and lived down a secret dread! But on the whole our presentiments are generally valuable, and it is the bitter taste at the end of the mouthful which is the real poison of the fruit whose first flavour was so sweet that we would not hear about its not being wholesome.

The day wore on in the lively society of Georgiana Oswald; but Adelaide's spirits flagged. There were thorns in her thoughts which would not be readily extracted. The phantom of giant despair which had haunted her through the day before, and which, though partially laid at night, had risen again with the morning, was not completely dispelled by Georgiana's explanation. It was only dwarfed.

To make the best of it, Charles had acted with precipitation in immediately engaging her father's

cast-off servant, and the father of her own dismissed housemaid, without the slightest reference to Mr. Snowden or to herself. It was not like him to be guilty of breaches of tact or decorum, and she could not understand it in this case, unless some very powerful motive lurked at the bottom of his action. She was sure, also, that her father would be highly indignant, and would think it a personal affront on the part of the younger man and his neighbour. The consequence of all these conflicting thoughts was that Adelaide was absent and silent, while Mrs. Oswald, pretending all the time to attribute it to fatigue and the heat, made herself more than usually amusing, talking of Old England and her own youth there, the experiences of her married life, and telling the story of her first arrival in Jamaica. As evening approached she looked up frequently at the clock.

"It is just the hour he said he should come, dear Adelaide. He will be here directly, for he is so *very, very* anxious about you, not having seen you for so many days; and I must tell you he

cannot quite get over the having seen you with Oliver Standing, When a man is desperately in love he is also always desperately jealous. It is in vain I laugh at him, and tell him he is a fool. So I forewarn you that you must expect a little scolding from him—just a little, you know, my dear."

Adelaide blushed and bit her lip. What had happened, that the secret of her love for Charles Falkener had become Mrs. Oswald's property to talk about and comment on? It was her one good, her life, the darling of her soul, and hitherto no breath had uttered it save his and hers. She had hovered over that fire, and fanned its embers, and carried them, burning, in her bosom; and now some one else dared to talk to her about it, and let in the light of common day upon her sole treasure, and scan and discuss it as if it were an ordinary thing. The common parlance of every day was used to describe the indescribable. That which should have had a language of its own, and been uttered in accents known only to Falkener and herself,

was clothed in vulgar talk; and it was Falkener who had done this, and this same Falkener was to scold her! She felt as Cleopatra might have done, if the swarthy Egyptian menial who bore her into Cæsar's presence, and slipped the carpet from her naked form, had dared to hint that the Roman might be scandalized. There was all the passionate woman's imperial majesty in Adelaide's nature, and the mere passing thought of possible coercion, and that from her lover, turned her blood into fire—covered, low-lying, smothered fire.

At last he came. He entered the room with quick, brisk steps, as though life were all sunshine, and truth, and constancy of perennial growth. It jarred on Adelaide's excited nerves. She did not rise from her chair; she looked up at him from under her dark brow without speaking, and when he stretched out his hand, she dropped her own into it. It was cold. Charles turned quickly to Mrs. Oswald, whom he had already greeted first as the lady of the house, and asked—

"Have you given her the bracelet?"

"Yes—do you not see she has it on her arm?"

She held up her arm; the bracelet was there, but still she only smiled faintly and did not speak. For a moment a shade of anxious discomposure crossed Charles's face, and he glanced across the room to where Mrs. Oswald stood. Their eyes met; it was less than a second, but Adelaide saw that glance, and saw there was an understanding between them.

"Adelaide is very tired this evening; the heat has been unusually oppressive to-day. I, too, have felt it very much—in short, Mr. Falkener, you must make yourself very agreeable to rouse us both a little."

"That's just the way to leave me not a word to say for myself; and yet I've been thinking of nothing all day long but of how soon I might venture to run down here."

"Then you might have come at least half an hour ago," said Adelaide, "for I am sure

Georgie has been watching the clock the last hour."

"And you have not done so at all, Miss Snowden?"

"There was no occasion, Mr. Falkener, when Georgie kept me informed as to the slow progress of your long delay."

"There, now!" exclaimed Mrs. Oswald, with a sudden movement, "if you two begin Mistering and Missing each other in that way because I'm here I shall go out of the room. But really, Mr. Falkener, you might have come sooner."

"The fact is I was kept by little George. He is not very well, and I was anxious. Mary, I suppose, understands all about it, and she seemed to think it was nothing serious—only the heat affecting him, as it has done all of us," —with a glance at Adelaide. "But it's an awful bore being so far from a doctor, and with a sick baby in the house."

"Poor little thing!" said Mrs. Oswald, rising at once. "What is the matter with him?—what does Mary say?"

"I don't understand much about it. The child is very pale, and lies very still and motionless in her lap, and refuses its food."

"I will go up to the house directly with my maid and see what is really the matter. The lives of those little darlings hang on a thread. One cannot be too particular. Don't you be anxious. You'll take care of Mr. Falkener, Addy, while I'm gone—I shall not be long."

"That is very kind of you, Mrs. Oswald. But really——"

"But me no buts. I could not rest in peace, nor, I'm sure, could Addy either; and as she can't go, I will."

The door closed on her, and Charles stood before Adelaide, looking down at her anxiously. She lifted her eyes to his face without moving a muscle, and said,

"It is very kind of Mrs. Oswald to forestall me in my future duties as step-mother."

"It *is* very kind of her," replied Charles, a little embarrassed how to reply. "I should feel it terribly if anything happened to the poor

little chap. Somehow or other, though I'm frightened out of my life to touch him, lest he should break to pieces in my hands, and I know nothing of course whatever about children, one does get very fond of the poor little mites when they are one's own."

"I suppose one does," said Adelaide, dreamily.

"You are not well to-night, darling. What is it?"

"There is nothing the matter with me, thank you. I should like to know, Charles, how long you and Mrs. Oswald have been on such intimate terms."

"I don't know what you mean by intimate. She is my tenant. She hasn't been here long. I have been down once or twice to see if everything was right and comfortable, as in fact I was bound to do. And she seems to me a very amiable, pleasing little woman."

"I should think you did, when you can sit with her till three o'clock in the morning."

"Nonsense, Adelaide! You know that was

an accident; and after all you were at the bottom of it--I came about your bracelet."

"The loss of my bracelet seems to have required a great deal of explanation, by the length of time it took you to give Mrs. Oswald the simple account of your picking it up by the gate where I dropt it. But even if I was at the bottom of that, I suppose you are not going to tell me I was at the bottom of your engaging my father's dismissed carpenter and my discharged housemaid the very day they left our service for misconduct, and that without the slightest reference to us."

This was a difficult stroke to parry. Falkener did not in the least know how much Mrs. Oswald had owned to, or whether she had hinted at the prudential motives which had made it so important for her that Sam's tongue should be tied. Besides, only to allude to such a thing was to compromise Mrs. Oswald, and to give a colour to Adelaide's already excited suspicions. He did, therefore, what everybody does on such occasions—turned aside the point

of his antagonist's weapon, and made a home-thrust himself.

"Do you want to quarrel with me, Adelaide?"

"I never want to quarrel with anybody; but I can't help it when I find myself aggrieved."

"What do you accuse me of?"

"How do I know what to accuse you of? I find you paying mysterious visits at midnight to my friend, for which all that nonsense about my bracelet is no excuse; and the next day I find you hastily receiving into your service *the* man who has been witness of your and Georgiana's folly, although that man is under my father's displeasure and mine."

"I think it deuced hard, if I want a carpenter, that I am not to engage one without asking your permission. I've nothing to do with Mr. Snowden's quarrels with his servants."

"You know my father quite well enough, Charles, to know he will consider it as a great slight put upon him—I may say an insult. You forget too, no doubt, that Sam's daughter was in my house, and I may say about my own

person, next to Nursie, and more than any other girl in the house. She came to me this morning to tell me she should want no character from me, as she was quite sure Mr. Falkener would get her a place with Mrs. Oswald. You may imagine how pleasant it is to me to hear your name coupled with hers by people who a few hours ago were my own servants."

"My dear Adelaide, I am very sorry anything should have occurred to annoy you. I have nothing whatever to do with that hussy Dinah, whom I hardly know by sight, and with whom I never exchanged a word in my life. I have engaged Sam because I required his services. As for the vulgar gossip of servants, I can't trouble myself about that; and you ought to be above minding anything they say."

"It is very fine to hear you talking about not minding what people say, when I know no one who is so the slave of the world's opinion. I don't mind one straw what people choose to say about me, but when facts come to my knowledge which touch what is nearer to my heart

than my own life, then I cannot take it so coolly as you do."

"In the name of common sense, Adelaide, what do you mean?"

"I mean, Charles, that there is more in all this than you choose to confess. It was not simple accident which kept you here the night before last till three in the morning. It is not mere *banale bonhomie* which has induced you to engage Sam at a moment's notice, and house the man who saw you here with Georgiana Oswald. Neither is it sheer stupidity which makes you so obtuse to any perception of the danger and annoyance to me if my father is disgusted with you—as he most certainly will be —for your conduct to the servants he has discharged for dishonesty. You may talk to the day of judgment but you'll never persuade me the whole thing is a succession of objectless, careless accidents."

"Well, my dear girl, all I can say is that if you're bent upon making yourself miserable, and me too, I can't help it. I have told you exactly

what happened. The whole thing lies in a nut-shell. I lingered on with Mrs. Oswald—talking about you. The next day I found I wanted a carpenter to do some work for me in some new tenements I am building, and I hired the first man who presented himself. If out of that you are going to discover any number of mares' nests, and work yourself into a fever, and break my heart, why, as I said before, I can't help it."

Really, when it comes to the point, it would seem as if a man could work out deception, without telling a direct lie, quite as well as a woman!

"And may I ask, pray, what you had to say to Georgiana about me which kept you both up till so far into the morning?"

"I had a great deal to say, Adelaide, because I had a great deal on my mind; and I was so mad about it that, as I could not say it to you, I said it to the first person I could get to listen to me. I was furious at your allowing that young puppy Standing to be always about you.

I saw you leaning over the gate with him, so deeply engaged in conversation that you could drop the bracelet I gave you without even perceiving it. And because I am in grief, and could not be there, you must needs go and flirt with that fellow, who I know is in love with you and thinks you encourage him. And all that when you are engaged to me!"

Adelaide had made a false move in asking that question. It directed the point of her enemy's rapier to the weak part of her armour. It enabled him to make a counter-attack, and put her on the defensive.

"That's mere rubbish, Charles. You *don't* know that Standing is in love with me, for I don't know it myself. And if he were, what difference does that make when, as you justly observe, I am engaged to you? As for your accusations against me of flirting, that does not come with particular grace from your lips, after the way in which I find you have contracted such a strict friendship with Mrs. Oswald. I deny that you had any right to talk to her about

me at all. *I* don't talk of you. I could not bear to do it. I don't want anyone to know my love. Do you suppose I care for anybody's sympathy about it but yours? It is profanation to my mind that anyone should know I love you. I am very fond of Georgie—at least I was; but now I shrink from the notion that she feels she has a *right* to talk to me about you, and even to question me about my feelings. Oh! Charles, how could you so desecrate our sacred secret?"

The tide was turning again. Mrs. Oswald had artfully allayed the first storm in Adelaide's troubled bosom. She had poured oil on the waters. Then Charles's appearance had evoked again the demon of disquiet. But now there had come the touch of tenderness which was once more to cover up the scar, if it could never heal the wound. "How could you so desecrate our sacred secret!" There was a world of eloquence in that one question. There was the sacred fire of passion, as it is known once in a life, and once only. The "secret" once betrayed

is never a secret again. Attachments, affections, may precede or may follow the one passion which bore the seal of a hallowed mystery. Calmer, and therefore holier, and therefore nobler love passages may cross a life-time; but the weird enchantment is for once only. Happy the life that has never known the seethings of that flame; and glorious the creed that under the sanction of man's higher destiny lifts a warning voice against those who walk in the light of their own fires, scorning the pure white light of heaven! Poor Adelaide had never heard that warning voice, and was one of those beings that, like the nobler trees or the highest towers, attract the scathing lightning. She was doomed to pass through the flames of Moloch, and who could hope she would come forth unharmed. She had no panoply of tried virtue, no asbestos-woven cloak to protect her quivering limbs from the devouring flame; and in the giant strength of her fierce heart she stood before the weaker and the shallower man.

"How could you so desecrate our sacred secret?" Is there any answer to such a question? Is there any reasoning before such an argument? Is the grammar written of that language, and can you conjugate the verbs? Will you talk to the lovers of past and future, they who only know the present? Is there memory or forethought in the two hearts that touched by one vibration emit but one note? Your wise saws and modern instances come too late!

And so once more the quarrel was made up. The brand of passion had cauterised the wound. It will break out again; and the scar is for ever!

When Mrs. Oswald came back she found Adelaide and Charles chatting with the ease and flow of old friends and new lovers. And she was—nobody!

She brought good news of the baby. She had held it in her arms, got it to take some nourishment, administered some remedy, and left it asleep in its cot.

Charles thanked her gratefully. But there was another light in his eyes than when she had left the house an hour and a half before. She saw at once that her brief absence had sufficed to blow away the brooding clouds of discord. And with all a woman's ready tact she accepted the situation; though perhaps not without some mental reserve with reference to the future, and some growing alienation of feeling from the beautiful and imperious girl who could so easily make foul or fair weather. All parties alike avoided reference to the past. The question of Sam and of Mr. Falkener's probable indignation at finding the old thief so well provided for was not discussed. The finding the bracelet was ignored. And even the party of two days previous did not lead to much discourse. The only safe subjects seemed to be those which had no connection with any thing that had recently occurred, and clever Mrs. Oswald found a prolific topic in the manners and customs of the Johnstones, mother and daughter.

"I am so glad, my dear Addy, that you and the Johnstones are upon terms again."

"And that is such a delightfully vague expression, Georgie, for it exactly describes the case by avoiding any definition of what you mean. We are upon 'terms,' as you say—that is, we don't cut each other. We shake hands cordially, to all appearance, whenever we meet; and it is to be hoped we don't backbite each other when absent."

"I know I can answer for Mrs. Johnstone, my dear. The truth is the old lady is very fond of you, and if she had any sons left you might still choose among them."

Adelaide and Charles exchanged a glance which did not escape Mrs. Oswald, and which she pretended not to see, while she noted all the marked mutual understanding which it contained.

"Poor Mrs. Johnstone! I wish with all my heart she had more sons; and certainly with all my heart she might keep them to herself,

though I must say it is very generous of her to wish another to be sacrificed to me."

"I don't see that under any circumstances you could have married the brother of a man who was killed in a duel for your sake," remarked Mr. Falkener.

"That's a man's view of the question, Charles. Love levels all. He levels up as well as levels down; and when he appears on the scene there is just himself and the two lovers, and nobody else."

"And no laws either, Addy?"

"There you are again with your old worn-out conventionalities, Charlie. What does it matter if the man I love be own brother to the man I murdered, or, it might be, that *he* murdered? For, you see, I will put the question at its worst."

"Would you marry a murderer, Addy, since, as you say, you have put the question at its worst?"

"Of course I would if I loved him. My love

would wash the blood off his hands, or prevent my seeing it."

Charles looked at her with awe and admiration.

"Isn't she a wonderful creature, Mrs. Oswald?" he said, as with a flushed cheek he turned round to their hostess, quietly sitting in her arm-chair, with some lazy knitting between her deft white fingers.

"I think, Mr. Falkener, you have found more than your match in her. There are very few things she could not or would not do if she chose."

"Even to marrying a murderer, Georgie, or committing a murder, I daresay, if I were sufficiently roused."

"Could you really, Addy?"

"Oh! Mr. Falkener, do you doubt it?" said the quietly supercilious lady, without lifting her eyes from her knitting, though quite conscious all the time of the excitement of the unlucky man thus caught in the toils of two women.

"Why, Mrs. Oswald, you seem to take it

almost for granted I should think it possible."

"And yet such things have been, and may be again, Mr. Falkener."

"That is true; but one does not expect to find it come home to one."

"*Cela dépend*," resumed the quiet Mrs. Oswald. "There are depths in Adelaide's nature you have not fathomed yet."

"Really I think you two are very cool, sitting talking of me to my face," said Adelaide laughing. "But seriously, does it surprise you, Georgie, as much as it does Mr. Falkener, that I should think it both possible to marry a murderer for love, or to commit a murder myself from the same motive?"

"Neither one nor the other surprises me in you, Addy. But both would be impossible to me."

"Well, I suppose that is what Charles would call having high principles. Such principles are not in my nature."

"But do not principles mean something higher than mere nature, dear Addy?" asked Charles.

He was leaning over the back of her chair. Two glorious dark orbs looked up at him, full of a swimming light, and a half-whispered voice said,

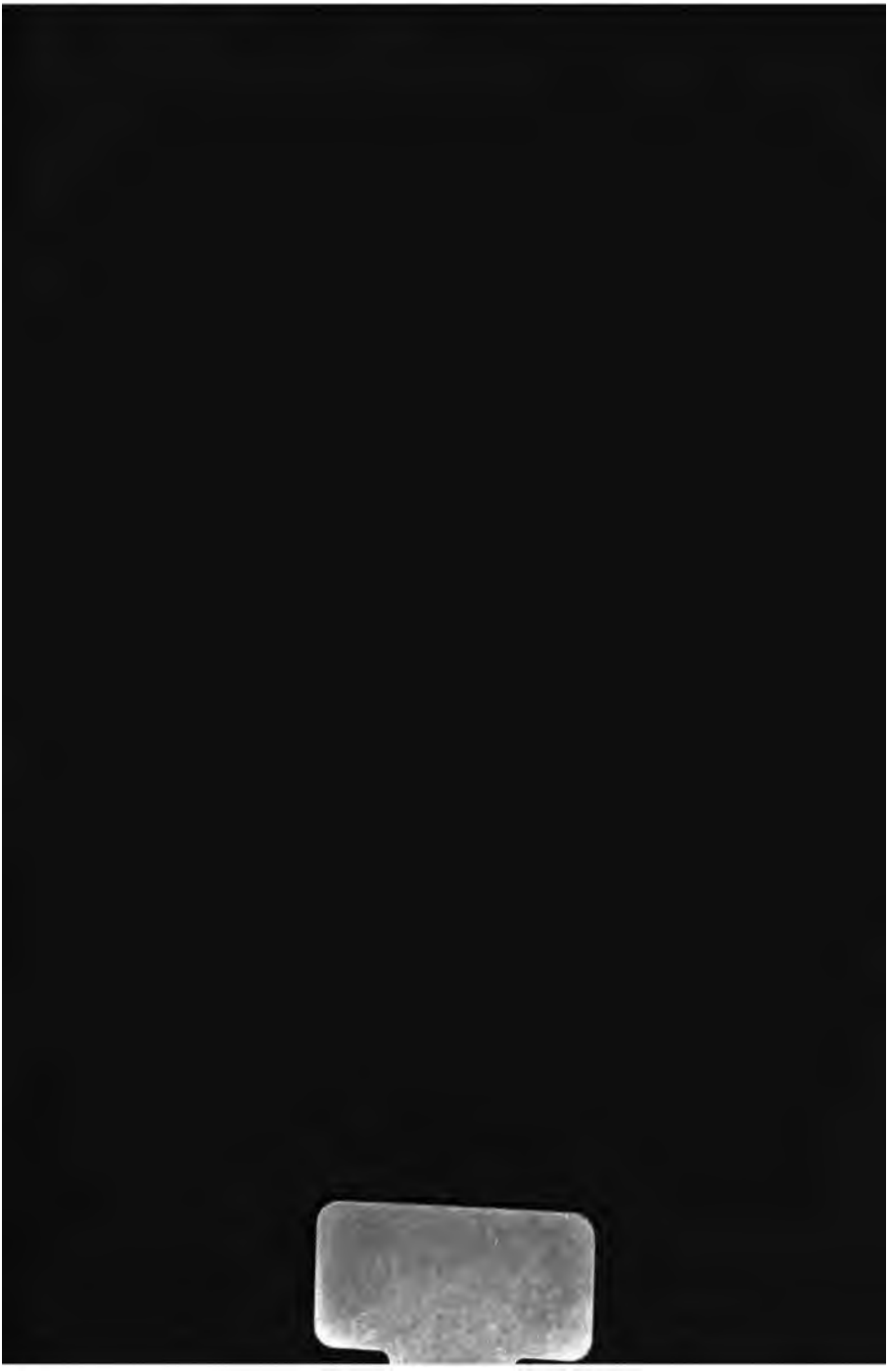
"I know nothing, and I ask for nothing higher than to love you, Charles, and be loved by you."

Perhaps Mrs. Oswald did not catch the exact words. It was quite unnecessary that she should do so. Her instinct gave her their meaning. She knitted on very calmly; but, without actually biting her lips, they thinned and paled in her fair, smooth face. Charles Falkener had drunk the light of those upturned eyes, and the precious draught had illuminated his whole being. He talked on as a man might do on whom some generous wine was slightly telling. He grew more brilliant, more charming, as the evening drew on, and there was a freedom of manner which never passed a certain limit, but which, within that limit, threw a charm of great intimacy into all he said that equally fascinated both his listeners. To all three it was a mo-

ment of intense life, but to Falkener alone was it without misgiving and without remorse. There was in his mind no looking back upon the very slight, brief passages with Mrs. Oswald. They were too light and immaterial to have left any lasting trace on the masculine mind, whatever they may have done on hers. Adelaide was more than ever his own, and his with the added intensity of their made-up quarrel. She spoke but little. She lay back in her chair rather paler than usual, and with a certain languid grace in all her movements. He could not tell how that smiling sea of deep still waters could yet call up black storms from its pellucid bosom. He had embarked "on the smooth surface of a Summer's sea," and he thought of no danger, "while fortune's favour filled his swelling sails."

Of those three sitting together on that evening, only one will look back through long years. One will hardly see it in enough of distance to judge of its proportions, and one will look at it

through a grey mist, the outline all bleared, and the objects all distorted. One alone was without presentiment.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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